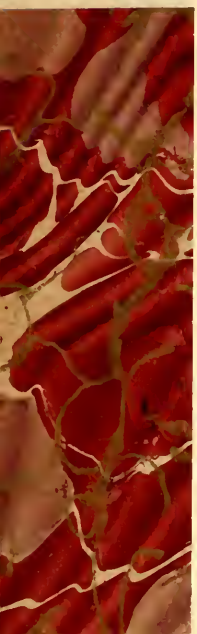

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No. 126

CAN YOU FORGIVE HER

BY

ANTHONY TROLLOPE

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VOLUME I.

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CAN YOU FORGIVE HER?

CHAPTER I.

MR. VAVASOR AND HIS DAUGHTER.

WHETHER or no, she, whom you are to forgive, if you can, did or did not belong to the Upper Ten Thousand of this our English world, I am not prepared to say with any strength of affirmation. By blood she was connected with big people,—distantly connected with some very big people indeed, people who belonged to the Upper Ten Hundred if there be any such division; but of these very big relations she had known and seen little, and they had cared as little for her. Her grandfather, Squire Vavasor of Vavasor Hall, in Westmoreland, was a country gentleman, possessing some thousand a year at the outside, and he therefore never came up to London, and had no ambition to have himself numbered as one in any exclusive set. A hot-headed, ignorant, honest old gentleman, he lived ever at Vavasor Hall, declaring to any who would listen to him, that the country was going to the mischief, and congratulating himself that at any rate, in his county, parliamentary reform had been

powerless to alter the old political arrangements. Alice Vavasor, whose offence against the world I am to tell you, and if possible to excuse, was the daughter of his younger son; and as her father, John Vavasor, had done nothing to raise the family name to eminence, Alice could not lay claim to any high position from her birth as a Vavasor. John Vavasor had come up to London early in life as a barrister, and had failed. He had failed at least in attaining either much wealth or much repute, though he had succeeded in earning, or perhaps I might better say, in obtaining, a livelihood. He had married a lady somewhat older than himself, who was in possession of four hundred a year, and who was related to those big people to whom I have alluded. Who these were, and the special nature of the relationship, I shall be called upon to explain hereafter, but at present it will suffice to say that Alice Macleod gave great offence to all her friends by her marriage. She did not, however, give them much time for the indulgence of their anger. Having given birth to a daughter within twelve months of her marriage, she died, leaving in abeyance that question as to whether the fault of her marriage should or should not be pardoned by her family.

When a man marries an heiress for her money, if that money be within her own control, as was the case with Miss Macleod's fortune, it is generally well for the speculating lover that the lady's friends should quarrel with him and with her. She is thereby driven to throw herself entirely into the gentleman's arms, and he thus becomes possessed of the wife and the money without the abominable nuisance of stringent settlements. But the Macleods, though they quarrelled

with Alice, did not quarrel with her à l'outrance. They snubbed herself and her chosen husband; but they did not so far separate themselves from her and her affairs as to give up the charge of her possessions. Her four hundred a year was settled very closely on herself and on her children, without even a life interest having been given to Mr. Vavasor, and therefore when she died the mother's fortune became the property of the little baby. But, under these circumstances, the big people did not refuse to interest themselves to some extent on behalf of the father. I do not suppose that any actual agreement or compact was made between Mr. Vavasor and the Macleods; but it came to be understood between them that if he made no demand upon them for his daughter's money, and allowed them to have charge of her education, they would do something for him. He was a practising barrister, though his practice had never amounted to much; and a practising barrister is always supposed to be capable of filling any situation which may come in his way. Two years after his wife's death Mr. Vavasor was appointed assistant commissioner in some office which had to do with insolvents, and which was abolished three years after his appointment. It was at first thought that he would keep his eight hundred a year for life and be required to do nothing for it; but a wretched cheeseparing whig government, as John Vavasor called it when describing the circumstances of the arrangement to his father, down in Westmoreland, would not permit this; it gave him the option of taking four hundred a year for doing nothing, or of keeping his whole income and attending three days a week for three hours a day during term time, at a

miserable dingy little office near Chancery Lane, where his duty would consist in signing his name to accounts which he never read, and at which he was never supposed even to look. He had sulkily elected to keep the money, and this signing had been now for nearly twenty years the business of his life. Of course he considered himself to be a very hardly-used man. One Lord Chancellor after another he petitioned, begging that he might be relieved from the cruelty of his position, and allowed to take his salary without doing anything in return for it. The amount of work which he did perform was certainly a minimum of labour. Term time, as terms were counted in Mr. Vavasor's office, hardly comprised half the year, and the hours of weekly attendance did not do more than make one day's work a week for a working man; but Mr. Vavasor had been appointed an assistant commissioner, and with every Lord Chancellor he argued that all Westminster Hall, and Lincoln's Inn to boot, had no right to call upon him to degrade himself by signing his name to accounts. In answer to every memorial he was offered the alternative of freedom with half his income; and so the thing went on.

There can, however, be no doubt that Mr. Vavasor was better off and happier with his almost nominal employment than he would have been without it. He always argued that it kept him in London; but he would undoubtedly have lived in London with or without his official occupation. He had become so habituated to London life in a small way, before the choice of leaving London was open to him, that nothing would have kept him long away from it. After his wife's death he dined at his club every day on which

a dinner was not given to him by some friend elsewhere, and was rarely happy except when so dining. They who have seen him scanning the steward's list of dishes, and giving the necessary orders for his own and his friend's dinner, at about half-past four in the afternoon, have seen John Vavasor at the only moment of the day at which he is ever much in earnest. All other things are light and easy to him,—to be taken easily and to be dismissed easily. Even the eating of the dinner calls forth from him no special sign of energy. Sometimes a frown will gather on his brow as he tastes the first half glass from his bottle of claret; but as a rule that which he has prepared for himself with so much elaborate care is consumed with only pleasant enjoyment. Now and again it will happen that the cook is treacherous even to him, and then he can hit hard; but in hitting he is quiet, and strikes with a smile on his face.

Such had been Mr. Vavasor's pursuits and pleasures in life up to the time at which my story commences. But I must not allow the reader to suppose that he was a man without good qualities. Had he when young possessed the gift of industry I think that he might have shone in his profession, and have been well spoken of and esteemed in the world. As it was he was a discontented man, but nevertheless he was popular, and to some extent esteemed. He was liberal as far as his means would permit; he was a man of his word; and he understood well that code of by-laws which was presumed to constitute the character of a gentleman in his circle. He knew how to carry himself well among men, and understood thoroughly what might be said, and what might not; what might be

done among those with whom he lived, and what should be left undone. By nature, too, he was kindly disposed, loving many persons a little if he loved few or none passionately. Moreover, at the age of fifty, he was a handsome man, with a fine forehead, round which the hair and beard was only beginning to show itself to be grey. He stood well, with a large person, only now beginning to become corpulent. His eyes were bright and grey, and his mouth and chin were sharply cut, and told of gentle birth. Most men who knew John Vavasor well declared it to be a pity that he should spend his time in signing accounts in Chancery Lane.

I have said that Alice Vavasor's big relatives cared but little for her in her early years; but I have also said that they were careful to undertake the charge of her education, and I must explain away this little discrepancy. The biggest of these big people had hardly heard of her; but there was a certain Lady Macleod, not very big herself, but, as it were, hanging on to the skirts of those who were so, who cared very much for Alice. She was the widow of a Sir Archibald Macleod, K.C.B., who had been a soldier, she herself having also been a Macleod by birth; and for very many years past—from a time previous to the birth of Alice Vavasor—she had lived at Cheltenham, making short sojourns in London during the spring, when the contents of her limited purse would admit of her doing so. Of old Lady Macleod I think I may say that she was a good woman;—that she was a good woman, though subject to two of the most serious drawbacks to goodness which can afflict a lady. She was a Calvinistic Sabbatarian in religion, and in worldly mat-

ters she was a devout believer in the high rank of her noble relatives. She could almost worship a youthful marquis, though he lived a life that would disgrace a heathen among heathens; and she could and did, in her own mind, condemn crowds of commonplace men and women to all eternal torments which her imagination could conceive, because they listened to profane music in a park on Sunday. Yet she was a good woman. Out of her small means she gave much away. She owed no man anything. She strove to love her neighbours. She bore much pain with calm unspeaking endurance, and she lived in trust of a better world. Alice Vavasor, who was after all only her cousin, she loved with an exceeding love, and yet Alice had done very much to extinguish such love. Alice, in the years of her childhood, had been brought up by Lady Macleod; at the age of twelve she had been sent to a school at Aix-la-Chapelle,—a comitatus of her relatives having agreed that such was to be her fate, much in opposition to Lady Macleod's judgment; at nineteen she had returned to Cheltenham, and after remaining there for little more than a year, had expressed her unwillingness to remain longer with her cousin. She could sympathise neither with her relative's faults nor virtues. She made an arrangement, therefore, with her father, that they two would keep house together in London, and so they had lived for the last five years;—for Alice Vavasor when she will be introduced to the reader had already passed her twenty-fourth birthday.

Their mode of life had been singular and certainly not in all respects satisfactory. Alice when she was twenty-one had the full command of her own fortune;

and when she induced her father, who for the last fifteen years had lived in lodgings, to take a small house in Queen Anne Street, of course she offered to incur a portion of the expense. He had warned her that his habits were not those of a domestic man, but he had been content simply so to warn her. He had not felt it to be his duty to decline the arrangement because he knew himself to be unable to give to his child all that attention which a widowed father under such circumstances should pay to an only daughter. The house had been taken, and Alice and he had lived together, but their lives had been quite apart. For a short time, for a month or two, he had striven to dine at home and even to remain at home through the evening; but the work had been too hard for him and he had utterly broken down. He had said to her and to himself that his health would fail him under the effects of so great a change made so late in life, and I am not sure that he had not spoken truly. At any rate the effort had been abandoned, and Mr. Vavasor now never dined at home. Nor did he and his daughter ever dine out together. Their joint means did not admit of their giving dinners, and therefore they could not make their joint way in the same circle. It thus came to pass that they lived apart,—quite apart. They saw each other, probably, daily; but they did little more than see each other. They did not even breakfast together, and after three o'clock in the day Mr. Vavasor was never to be found in his own house.

Miss Vavasor had made for herself a certain footing in society, though I am disposed to doubt her right to be considered as holding a place among the Upper Ten Thousand. Two classes of people she had chosen

to avoid, having been driven to such avoidings by her aunt's preferences; marquises and such-like, whether wicked or otherwise, she had eschewed, and had eschewed likewise all Low Church tendencies. The eschewing of marquises is not generally very difficult. Young ladies living with their fathers on very moderate incomes in or about Queen Anne Street are not usually much troubled on that matter. Nor can I say that Miss Vavasor was so troubled. But with her there was a certain definite thing to be done towards such eschewal. Lady Macleod by no means avoided her noble relatives, nor did she at all avoid Alice Vavasor. When in London she was persevering in her visits to Queen Anne Street, though she considered herself, nobody knew why, not to be on speaking terms with Mr. Vavasor. And she strove hard to produce an intimacy between Alice and her noble relatives—such an intimacy as that which she herself enjoyed;—an intimacy which gave her a footing in their houses but no footing in their hearts, or even in their habits. But all this Alice declined with as much consistency as she did those other struggles which her old cousin made on her behalf,—strong, never-flagging, but ever-failing efforts to induce the girl to go to such places of worship as Lady Macleod herself frequented.

A few words must be said as to Alice Vavasor's person; one fact also must be told, and then, I believe, I may start upon my story. As regards her character, I will leave it to be read in the story itself. The reader already knows that she appears upon the scene at no very early age, and the mode of her life had perhaps given to her an appearance of more years than those which she really possessed. It was not that her

face was old, but that there was nothing that was girlish in her manners. Her demeanour was as staid, and her voice as self-possessed as though she had already been ten years married. In person she was tall and well made, rather large in her neck and shoulders, as were all the Vavasors, but by no means fat. Her hair was brown, but very dark, and she wore it rather lower upon her forehead than is customary at the present day. Her eyes, too, were dark, though they were not black, and her complexion, though not quite that of a brunette, was far away from being fair. Her nose was somewhat broad, and retroussé too, but to my thinking it was a charming nose, full of character, and giving to her face at times a look of pleasant humour, which it would otherwise have lacked. Her mouth was large, and full of character, and her chin oval, dimpled, and finely chiselled, like her father's. I beg you, in taking her for all in all, to admit that she was a fine, handsome, high-spirited young woman.

And now for my fact. At the time of which I am writing she was already engaged to be married.

CHAPTER II.

LADY MACLEOD.

I CANNOT say that the house in Queen Anne Street was a pleasant house. I am now speaking of the material house, made up of the walls and furniture, and not of any pleasantness or unpleasantness supplied by the inmates. It was a small house on the south side of the street, squeezed in between two large mansions which seemed to crush it, and by which its fair proportion of doorstep and area was in truth curtailed. The stairs were narrow; the dining-room was dark, and possessed none of those appearances of plenteous hospitality which a dining-room should have. But all this would have been as nothing if the drawing-room had been pretty as it is the bounden duty of all drawing-rooms to be. But Alice Vavasor's drawing-room was not pretty. Her father had had the care of furnishing the house, and he had entrusted the duty to a tradesman who had chosen green paper, a green carpet, green curtains, and green damask chairs. There was a green damask sofa, and two green arm-chairs opposite to each other at the two sides of the fireplace. The room was altogether green, and was not enticing. In shape it was nearly square, the very small back room on the same floor not having been, as is usual, added to it. This had been fitted up as a "study" for Mr. Vavasor, and was very rarely used for any purpose.

Most of us know when we enter a drawing-room whether it is a pretty room or no; but how few of us know how to make a drawing-room pretty! There has come up in London in these latter days a form of room so monstrously ugly that I will venture to say that no other people on earth but Londoners would put up with it. Londoners, as a rule, take their houses as they can get them, looking only to situation, size, and price. What Grecian, what Roman, what Turk, what Italian would endure, or would ever have endured, to use a room with a monstrous cantle in the form of a parallelogram cut sheerly out of one corner of it? This is the shape of room we have now adopted,—or rather which the builders have adopted for us,—in order to throw the whole first floor into one apartment which may be presumed to have noble dimensions,—with such drawback from it as the necessities of the staircase may require. A sharp unadorned corner projects itself into these would-be noble dimensions, and as ugly a form of chamber is produced as any upon which the eye can look. I would say more on the subject if I dared to do so here, but I am bound now to confine myself to Miss Vavasor's room. The monstrous deformity of which I have spoken was not known when that house in Queen Anne Street was built. There is to be found no such abomination of shape in the buildings of our ancestors,—not even in the days of George the Second. But yet the drawing-room of which I speak was ugly, and Alice knew that it was so. She knew that it was ugly, and she would greatly have liked to banish the green sofa, to have repapered the wall, and to have hung up curtains with a dash of pink through them. With the green carpet

she would have been contented. But her father was an extravagant man; and from the day on which she had come of age she had determined that it was her special duty to avoid extravagance.

"It 's the ugliest room I ever saw in my life," her father once said to her.

"It is not very pretty," Alice replied.

"I 'll go halves with you in the expense of redoing it," said Mr. Vavasor.

"Would n't that be extravagant, papa? The things have not been here quite four years yet."

Then Mr. Vavasor had shrugged his shoulders and said nothing more about it. It was little to him whether the drawing-room in Queen Anne Street was ugly or pretty. He was on the committee of his club, and he took care that the furniture there should be in all respects comfortable.

It was now June; and that month Lady Macleod was in the habit of spending among her noble relatives in London when she had succeeded in making both ends so far overlap each other at Cheltenham as to give her the fifty pounds necessary for this purpose. For though she spent her month in London among her noble friends, it must not be supposed that her noble friends gave her bed or board. They sometimes gave her tea, such as it was, and once or twice in the month they gave the old lady a second-rate dinner. On these occasions she hired a little parlour and bedroom behind it in King Street, Saint James's, and lived a hot, uncomfortable life, going about at nights to gatherings of fashionable people of which she in her heart disapproved, seeking for smiles which seldom came to her, and which she excused herself for desir-

ing because they were the smiles of her kith and her kin, telling herself always that she made this vain journey to the modern Babylon for the good of Alice Vavasor, and telling herself as often that she now made it for the last time. On the occasion of her preceding visit she had reminded herself that she was then seventy-five years old, and had sworn to herself that she would come to London no more; but here she was again in London, having justified the journey to herself on the plea that there were circumstances in Alice's engagement which made it desirable that she should for a while be near her niece. Her niece, as she thought, was hardly managing her own affairs discreetly.

"Well, aunt," said Alice, as the old lady walked into the drawing-room one morning at eleven o'clock. Alice always called Lady Macleod her aunt, though, as has been before explained, there was no such close connection between them. During Lady Macleod's sojourn in London these morning visits were made almost every day. Alice never denied herself, and even made a point of remaining at home to receive them unless she had previously explained that she would be out; but I am not prepared to say that they were, of their own nature, agreeable to her.

"Would you mind shutting the window, my dear?" said Lady Macleod, seating herself stiffly on one of the small ugly green chairs. She had been educated at a time when easy-chairs were considered vicious, and among people who regarded all easy postures as being so; and she could still boast, at seventy-six, that she never leaned back. "Would you mind shutting the window? I 'm so warm that I 'm afraid of the draught."

"You don't mean to say that you 've walked from King Street," said Alice, doing as she was desired.

"Indeed I do,—every step of the way. Cabs are so ruinous. It 's a most unfortunate thing; they always say it 's just over the two miles here. I don't believe a word of it, because I 'm only a little more than the half-hour walking it; and those men will say anything. But how can I prove it, you know?"

"I really think it 's too far for you to walk when it 's so warm."

"But what can I do, my dear? I must come, when I 've specially come up to London to see you. I shall have a cab back again, because it 'll be hotter then, and dear Lady Midlothian has promised to send her carriage at three to take me to the concert. I do so wish you 'd go, Alice."

"It 's out of the question, aunt. The idea of my going in that way at the last moment, without any invitation!"

"It would n't be without an invitation, Alice. The marchioness has said to me over and over again how glad she would be to see you, if I would bring you."

"Why does n't she come and call if she is so anxious to know me?"

"My dear, you 've no right to expect it; you have n't indeed. She never calls even on me."

"I know I 've no right, and I don't expect it, and I don't want it. But neither has she a right to suppose that, under such circumstances, I shall go to her house. You might as well give it up, aunt. Cart ropes would n't drag me there."

"I think you are very wrong,—particularly under

your present circumstances. A young woman that is going to be married, as you are——"

"As I am,—perhaps."

"That 's nonsense, Alice. Of course you are; and for his sake you are bound to cultivate any advantages that naturally belong to you. As to Lady Midlothian or the marchioness coming to call on you here in your father's house, after all that has passed, you really have no right to look for it."

"And I don't look for it."

"That sort of people are not expected to call. If you 'll think of it, how could they do it with all the demands they have on their time?"

"My dear aunt, I would n't interfere with their time for worlds."

"Nobody can say of me, I 'm sure, that I run after great people or rich people. It does happen that some of the nearest relations I have,—indeed I may say the nearest relations,—are people of high rank; and I do not see that I 'm bound to turn away from my own flesh and blood because of that, particularly when they are always so anxious to keep up the connection."

"I was only speaking of myself, aunt. It is very different with you. You have known them all your life."

"And how are you to know them if you won't begin? Lady Midlothian said to me only yesterday that she was glad to hear that you were going to be married so respectably, and then——"

"Upon my word I am very much obliged to her ladyship. I wonder whether she considered that she married respectably when she took Lord Midlothian?"

Now Lady Midlothian had been unfortunate in her marriage, having united herself to a man of bad character, who had used her ill, and from whom she had now been for some years separated. Alice might have spared her allusion to this misfortune when speaking of the countess to the cousin who was so fond of her, but she was angered by the application of that odious word respectable to her own prospects; and perhaps the more angered as she was somewhat inclined to feel that the epithet did suit her own position. Her engagement, she had sometimes told herself, was very respectable, and had as often told herself that it lacked other attractions which it should have possessed. She was not quite pleased with herself in having accepted John Grey,—or rather perhaps was not satisfied with herself in having loved him. In her many thoughts on the subject, she always admitted to herself that she had accepted him simply because she loved him;—that she had given her quick assent to his quick proposal simply because he had won her heart. But she was sometimes almost angry with herself that she had permitted her heart to be thus easily taken from her, and had rebuked herself for her girlish facility. But the marriage would be at any rate respectable. Mr. Grey was a man of high character, of good though moderate means; he was, too, well educated, of good birth, a gentleman, and a man of talent. No one could deny that the marriage would be highly respectable, and her father had been more than satisfied. Why Miss Vavasor herself was not quite satisfied will, I hope, in time make itself appear. In the meanwhile it can be understood that Lady Midlothian's praise would gall her.

"Alice, don't be uncharitable," said Lady Macleod severely. "Whatever may have been Lady Midlothian's misfortunes no one can say that they have resulted from her own fault."

"Yes they can, aunt, if she married a man whom she knew to be a scapegrace because he was very rich and an earl."

"She was the daughter of a nobleman herself, and only married in her own degree. But I don't want to discuss that. She meant to be good-natured when she mentioned your marriage, and you should take it as it was meant. After all she was only your mother's second cousin——"

"Dear aunt, I make no claim on her cousinship."

"But she admits the claim, and is quite anxious that you should know her. She has been at the trouble to find out everything about Mr. Grey, and told me that nothing could be more satisfactory."

"Upon my word I am very much obliged to her."

Lady Macleod was a woman of much patience, and possessed also of considerable perseverance. For another half-hour she went on expatiating on the advantages which would accrue to Alice as a married woman from an acquaintance with her noble relatives, and endeavouring to persuade her that no better opportunity than the present would present itself. There would be a place in Lady Midlothian's carriage, as none other of the daughters were going but Lady Jane. Lady Midlothian would take it quite as a compliment, and a concert was not like a ball or any customary party. An unmarried girl might very properly go to a concert under such circumstances as now existed without any special invitation. Lady Macleod

ought to have known her adopted niece better. Alice was immovable. As a matter of course she was immovable. Lady Macleod had seldom been able to persuade her to anything, and ought to have been well sure that, of all things, she could not have persuaded her to this.

Then, at last, they came to another subject, as to which Lady Macleod declared that she had specially come on this special morning, forgetting, probably, that she had already made the same assertion with reference to the concert. But in truth the last assertion was the correct one, and on that other subject she had been hurried on to say more than she meant by the eagerness of the moment. All the morning she had been full of the matter on which she was now about to speak. She had discussed it quite at length with Lady Midlothian;—though she was by no means prepared to tell Alice Vavasor that any such discussion had taken place. From the concert, and the effect which Lady Midlothian's countenance might have upon Mr. Grey's future welfare, she got herself by degrees round to a projected Swiss tour which Alice was about to make. Of this Swiss tour she had heard before, but had not heard who were to be Miss Vavasor's companions until Lady Midlothian had told her. How it had come to pass that Lady Midlothian had interested herself so much in the concerns of a person whom she did not know, and on whom she in her greatness could not be expected to call, I cannot say; but from some quarter she had learned who were the proposed companions of Alice Vavasor's tour, and she had told Lady Macleod that she did not at all approve of the arrangement.

"And when do you go, Alice?" said Lady Macleod.

"Early in July, I believe. It will be very hot, but Kate must be back by the middle of August." Kate Vavasor was Alice's first cousin.

"Oh! Kate is to go with you?"

"Of course she is. I could not go alone, or with no one but George. Indeed it was Kate who made up the party."

"Of course you could not go alone with George," said Lady Macleod, very grimly. Now George Vavasor was Kate's brother, and was therefore also first cousin to Alice. He was heir to the old squire down in Westmoreland, with whom Kate lived, their father being dead. Nothing, it would seem, could be more rational than that Alice should go to Switzerland with her cousins; but Lady Macleod was clearly not of this opinion; she looked very grim as she made this allusion to Cousin George, and seemed to be preparing herself for a fight.

"That is exactly what I say," answered Alice. "But, indeed, he is simply going as an escort to me and Kate, as we don't like the rôle of unprotected females. It is very good-natured of him, seeing how much his time is taken up."

"I thought he never did anything."

"That 's because you don't know him, aunt."

"No; certainly I don't know him." She did not add that she had no wish to know Mr. George Vavasor, but she looked it. "And has your father been told that he is going?"

"Of course he has."

"And does——" Lady Macleod hesitated a little before she went on, and then finished her question with

a little spasmodic assumption of courage. "And does Mr. Grey know that he is going?"

Alice remained silent for a full minute before she answered this question, during which Lady Macleod sat watching her grimly, with her eyes very intent upon her niece's face. If she supposed such silence to have been in any degree produced by shame in answering the question, she was much mistaken. But it may be doubted whether she understood the character of the girl whom she thought she knew so well, and it is probable that she did make such mistake.

"I might tell you simply that he does," said Alice at last, "seeing that I wrote to him yesterday, letting him know that such were our arrangements; but I feel that I should not thus answer the question you mean to ask. You want to know whether Mr. Grey will approve of it. As I only wrote yesterday of course I have not heard, and therefore cannot say. But I can say this, aunt, that much as I might regret his disapproval, it would make no change in my plans."

"Would it not? Then I must tell you, you are very wrong. It ought to make a change. What! the disapproval of the man you are going to marry make no change in your plans?"

"Not in that matter. Come, aunt, if we must discuss this matter let us do it at any rate fairly. In an ordinary way, if Mr. Grey had asked me to give up for any reason my trip altogether, I should have given it up certainly, as I would give up any other indifferent project at the request of so dear a friend,—a friend with whom I am so—so—so—closely connected. But if he asked me not to travel with my cousin George,

I should refuse him absolutely, without a word of parley on the subject, simply because of the nature and closeness of my connection with him. I suppose you understand what I mean, aunt?"

"I suppose I do. You mean that you would refuse to obey him on the very subject on which he has a right to claim your obedience."

"He has no right to claim my obedience on any subject," said Alice; and as she spoke Aunt Macleod jumped up with a little start at the vehemence of the words, and of the tone in which they were expressed. She had heard that tone before, and might have been used to it; but, nevertheless, the little jump was involuntary. "At present he has no right to my obedience on any subject, but least of all on that," said Alice. "His advice he may give me, but I am quite sure he will not ask for obedience."

"And if he advises you you will slight his advice."

"If he tells me that I had better not travel with my cousin George I shall certainly not take his advice. Moreover, I should be careful to let him know how much I was offended by any such counsel from him. It would show a littleness on his part, and a suspicion of which I cannot suppose him to be capable." Alice, as she said this, got up from her seat and walked about the room. When she had finished she stood at one of the windows with her back to her visitor. There was silence between them for a minute or two, during which Lady Macleod was deeply considering how best she might speak the terrible words, which, as Alice's nearest female relative, she felt herself bound to utter. At last she collected her thoughts and her courage, and spoke out.

"My dear Alice, I need hardly say that if you had a mother living, or any person with you filling the place of a mother, I should not interfere in this matter."

"Of course, Aunt Macleod, if you think I am wrong you have quite a right to say so."

"I do think you are wrong,—very wrong, indeed; and if you persist in this I am afraid I must say that I shall think you wicked. Of course Mr. Grey cannot like you to travel with George Vavasor."

"And why not, aunt?" Alice, as she asked this question, turned round and confronted Lady Macleod boldly. She spoke with a steady voice, and fixed her eyes upon the old lady's face, as though determined to show that she had no fear of what might be said to her.

"Why not, Alice? Surely you do not wish me to say why not."

"But I do wish you to say why not. How can I defend myself till the accusation is made?"

"You are now engaged to marry Mr. Grey, with the consent and approbation of all your friends. Two years ago you had—had——"

"Had what, aunt? If you mean to say that two years ago I was engaged to my cousin George you are mistaken. Three years ago I told him that under certain conditions I would become engaged to him. But my conditions did not suit him, nor his me, and no engagement was ever made. Mr. Grey knows the history of the whole thing. As far as it was possible I have told him everything that took place."

"The fact was, Alice, that George Vavasor's mode of life was such that an engagement with him would have been absolute madness."

"Dear aunt, you must excuse me if I say that I cannot discuss George Vavasor's mode of life. If I were thinking of becoming his wife you would have a perfect right to discuss it, because of your constant kindness to me. But as matters are he is simply a cousin; and as I like him and you do not, we had better say nothing about him."

"I must say this,—that after what has passed, and at the present crisis of your life——"

"Dear aunt, I 'm not in any crisis."

"Yes you are, Alice; in the most special crisis of a girl's life. You are still a girl, but you are the promised wife of a very worthy man, who will look to you for all his domestic happiness. George Vavasor has the name, at least, of being very wild."

"The worthy man and the wild man must fight it out between them. If I were going away with George by himself, there might be something in what you say."

"That would be monstrous."

"Monstrous or not, it is n't what I 'm about to do. Kate and I have put our purses together, and are going to have an outing for our special fun and gratification. As we should be poor travellers alone, George has promised to go with his sister. Papa knows all about it, and never thought of making any objection."

Lady Macleod shook her head. She did not like to say anything against Mr. Vavasor before his daughter; but the shaking of her head was intended to signify that Mr. Vavasor's assent in such a matter was worth nothing.

"I can only say again," said Lady Macleod, "that I think Mr. Grey will be displeased,—and that he will

have very great cause for displeasure. And I think, moreover, that his approbation ought to be your chief study. I believe, my dear, I 'll ask you to let Jane get me a cab. I shan't have a bit too much time to dress for the concert."

Alice simply rang the bell, and said no further word on the subject which they had been discussing. When Lady Macleod got up to go away, Alice kissed her, as was customary with them, and the old lady as she went uttered her customary valediction. "God bless you, my dear. Good-bye! I 'll come to-morrow if I can." There was therefore no quarrel between them. But both of them felt that words had been spoken which must probably lead to some diminution of their past intimacy.

When Lady Macleod had gone Alice sat alone for an hour thinking of what had passed between them,—thinking rather of those two men, the worthy man and the wild man, whose names had been mentioned in close connection with herself. John Grey was a worthy man, a man worthy at all points, as far as she knew him. She told herself that it was so. And she told herself, also, that her cousin George was wild,—very wild. And yet her thoughts were, I fear, on the whole more kindly towards her cousin than towards her lover. She had declared to her aunt that John Grey would be incapable of such suspicion as would be shown by any objection on his part to the arrangements made for the tour. She had said so, and had so believed; and yet she continued to brood over the position which her affairs would take, if he did make the objection which Lady Macleod anticipated. She told herself over and over again, that under such cir-

cumstances she would not give way an inch. "He is free to go," she said to herself. "If he does not trust me he is quite free to go." It may almost be said that she came at last to anticipate from her lover that very answer to her own letter which she had declared him to be incapable of making.

CHAPTER III.

JOHN GREY, THE WORTHY MAN.

Mr. Grey's answer to Alice Vavasor's letter, which was duly sent by return of post and duly received on the morning after Lady Macleod's visit, may perhaps be taken as giving a sample of his worthiness. It was dated from Nethercoats, a small country-house in Cambridgeshire which belonged to him, at which he already spent much of his time, and at which he intended to live altogether after his marriage.

"Nethercoats, June, 186—.

"Dearest Alice,—I am glad you have settled your affairs,—foreign affairs, I mean,—so much to your mind. As to your home affairs they are not, to my thinking, quite so satisfactorily arranged. But as I am a party interested in the latter my opinion may perhaps have an undue bias. Touching the tour, I quite agree with you that you and Kate would have been uncomfortable alone. It 's a very fine theory, that of women being able to get along without men as well as with them; but, like other fine theories, it will be found very troublesome by those who first put it in practice. Gloved hands, petticoats, feminine softness, and the general homage paid to beauty, all stand in the way of success. These things may perhaps some day be got rid of, and possibly with advantage; but while young

ladies are still encumbered with them a male companion will always be found to be a comfort. I don't quite know whether your cousin George is the best possible knight you might have chosen. I should consider myself to be infinitely preferable, had my going been upon the cards. Were you in danger of meeting Paynim foes, he, no doubt, would kill them off much quicker than I could do, and would be much more serviceable in liberating you from the dungeons of oppressors, or even from stray tigers in the Swiss forests. But I doubt his being punctual with the luggage. He will want you or Kate to keep the accounts, if any are kept. He will be slow in getting you glasses of water at the railway stations, and will always keep you waiting at breakfast. I hold that a man with two ladies on a tour should be an absolute slave to them, or they will not fully enjoy themselves. He should simply be an upper servant, with the privilege of sitting at the same table with his mistresses. I have my doubts as to whether your cousin is fit for the place; but, as to myself, it is just the thing that I was made for. Luckily, however, neither you nor Kate are without wills of your own, and perhaps you may be able to reduce Mr. Vavasor to obedience.

"As to the home affairs I have very little to say here,—in this letter. I shall of course run up and see you before you start, and shall probably stay a week in town. I know I ought not to do so, as it will be a week of idleness, and yet not a week of happiness. I 'd sooner have an hour with you in the country than a whole day in London. And I always feel in town that I 've too much to do to allow of my doing anything. If it were sheer idleness I could enjoy it, but

it is a feverish idleness, in which one is driven here and there, expecting some gratification which not only never comes, but which never even begins to come. I will, however, undergo a week of it,—say the last seven days of this month, and shall trust to you to recompense me by as much of yourself as your town doings will permit.

"And now again as to those home affairs. If I say nothing now I believe you will understand why I refrain. You have cunningly just left me to imply, from what you say, that all my arguments have been of no avail; but you do not answer them, or even tell me that you have decided. I shall therefore imply nothing, and still trust to my personal eloquence for success. Or rather not trust,—not trust, but hope.

"The garden is going on very well. We are rather short of water, and therefore not quite as bright as I had hoped; but we are preparing with untiring industry for future brightness. Your commands have been obeyed in all things, and Morrison always says, 'The mistress did n't mean this,' or 'The mistress did intend that.' God bless the mistress is what I now say, and send her home, to her own home, to her flowers, and her fruit, and her house, and her husband, as soon as may be, with no more of those delays which are to me so grievous, and which seem to me to be so unnecessary. That is my prayer.

"Yours ever and always,

"J. G."

"I did n't give commands," Alice said to herself, as she sat with the letter at her solitary breakfast-table. "He asked me how I liked the things, and of course

I was obliged to say. I was obliged to seem to care, even if I did n't care." Such were her first thoughts as she put the letter back into its envelope, after reading it the second time. When she opened it, which she did quickly, not pausing a moment lest she should suspect herself of fearing to see what might be its contents, her mind was full of that rebuke which her aunt had anticipated, and which she had almost taught herself to expect. She had torn the letter open rapidly, and had dashed at its contents with quick eyes. In half a moment she had seen what was the nature of the reply respecting the proposed companion of her tour, and then she had completed her reading slowly enough. "No; I gave no commands," she repeated to herself, as though she might thereby absolve herself from blame in reference to some possible future accusations, which might perhaps be brought against her under certain circumstances which she was contemplating.

Then she considered the letter bit by bit, taking it backwards, and sipping her tea every now and then amidst her thoughts. No; she had no home, no house, there. She had no husband;—not as yet. He spoke of their engagement as though it were a betrothal, as betrothals used to be of yore; as though they were already in some sort married. Such betrothals were not made now-a-days. There still remained, both to him and to her, a certain liberty of extricating themselves from this engagement. Should he come to her and say that he found that their contemplated marriage would not make him happy, would not she release him without a word of reproach? Would not she regard him as much more honourable

in doing so than in adhering to a marriage which was distasteful to him? And if she would so judge him,—judge him and certainly acquit him, was it not reasonable that she under similar circumstances should expect a similar acquittal? Then she declared to herself that she carried on this argument within her own breast simply as an argument, induced to do so by that assertion on his part that he was already her husband,—that his house was even now her home. She had no intention of using that power which was still hers. She had no wish to go back from her pledged word. She thought that she had no such wish. She loved him much, and admired him even more than she loved him. He was noble, generous, clever, good,—so good as to be almost perfect; nay, for aught she knew he was perfect. Would that he had some faults! Would that he had! Would that he had! How could she, full of faults as she knew herself to be,—how could she hope to make happy a man perfect as he was! But then there would be no doubt as to her present duty. She loved him, and that was everything. Having told him that she loved him, and having on that score accepted his love, nothing but a change in her heart towards him could justify her in seeking to break the bond which bound them together. She did love him, and she loved him only.

But she had once loved her cousin. Yes, truly it was so. In her thoughts she did not now deny it. She had loved him, and was tormented by a feeling that she had had a more full delight in that love than in this other that had sprung up subsequently. She had told herself that this had come of her youth;—that love at twenty was sweeter than it could be after-

wards. There had been a something of rapture in that earlier dream which could never be repeated,—which could never live, indeed, except in a dream. Now, now that she was older and perhaps wiser, love meant a partnership, in which each partner would be honest to the other, in which each would wish and strive for the other's welfare, so that thus their joint welfare might be insured. Then, in those early girlish days, it had meant a total abnegation of self. The one was of earth, and therefore possible. The other had been a ray from heaven,—and impossible, except in a dream.

And she had been mistaken in her first love. She admitted that frankly. He whom she had worshipped had been an idol of clay, and she knew that it was well for her to have abandoned that idolatry. He had not only been untrue to her, but, worse than that, had been false in excusing his untruth. He had not only promised falsely, but had made such promises with a deliberate, premeditated falsehood. And he had been selfish, coldly selfish, weighing the value of his own low lusts against that of her holy love. She had known this, and had parted from him with an oath to herself that no promised contrition on his part should ever bring them again together. But she had pardoned him as a man, though never as a lover, and had bade him welcome again as a cousin and as her friend's brother. She had again become very anxious as to his career, not hiding her regard, but professing that anxiety aloud. She knew him to be clever, ambitious, bold,—and she believed even yet, in spite of her own experience, that he might not be bad at heart. Now, as she told herself that in truth she loved

the man to whom her troth was plighted, I fear that she almost thought more of that other man from whom she had torn herself asunder.

"Why should he find himself unhappy in London?" she said, as she went back to the letter. "Why should he pretend to condemn the very place which most men find the fittest for all their energies? Were I a man, no earthly consideration should induce me to live elsewhere. It is odd how we differ in all things. However brilliant might be his own light, he would be contented to hide it under a bushel!"

And at last she recurred to that matter as to which she had been so anxious when she first opened her lover's letter. It will be remembered how assured she had expressed herself that Mr. Grey would not condescend to object to her travelling with her cousin. He had not so condescended. He had written on the matter with a pleasant joke, like a gentleman as he was, disdaining to allude to the past passages in the life of her whom he loved, abstaining even from expressing anything that might be taken as a permission on his part. There had been in Alice's words, as she told him of their proposed plan, a something that had betrayed a tremor in her thoughts. She had studiously striven so to frame her phrases that her tale might be told as any other simple statement,—as though there had been no trembling in her mind as she wrote. But she had failed, and she knew that she had failed. She had failed; and he had read all her effort and all her failure. She was quite conscious of this; she felt it thoroughly; and she knew that he was noble and a gentleman to the last drop of his blood. And yet—yet—yet there was almost a feeling

of disappointment in that he had not written such a letter as Lady Macleod had anticipated.

During the next week Lady Macleod still came almost daily to Queen Anne Street, but nothing further was said between her and Miss Vavasor as to the Swiss tour; nor were any questions asked about Mr. Grey's opinion on the subject. The old lady of course discovered that there was no quarrel, or, as she believed, any probability of a quarrel; and with that she was obliged to be contented. Nor did she again on this occasion attempt to take Alice to Lady Midlothian's. Indeed, their usual subjects of conversation were almost abandoned, and Lady Macleod's visits, though they were as constant as heretofore, were not so long. She did not dare to talk about Mr. Grey, and because she did not so dare, was determined to regard herself as in a degree ill-used. So she was silent, reserved, and fretful. At length came the last day of her London season, and her last visit to her niece. "I would come because it 's my last day," said Lady Macleod; "but really I 'm so hurried, and have so many things to do, that I hardly know how to manage it."

"It 's very kind," said Alice, giving her aunt an affectionate squeeze of the hand.

"I 'm keeping the cab, so I can just stay twenty-five minutes. I 've marked the time accurately, but I know the man will swear it 's over the half-hour."

"You 'll have no more trouble about cabs, aunt, when you are back in Cheltenham."

"The flies are worse, my dear. I really think they 're worse. I pay the bill every month, but they 've always one down that I did n't have. It 's the regular

practice, for I 've had them from all the men in the place."

"It 's hard enough to find honest men anywhere, I suppose."

"Or honest women either. What do you think of Mrs. Green wanting to charge me for an extra week, because she says I did n't give her notice till Tuesday morning? I won't pay her, and she may stop my things if she dares. However, it 's the last time. I shall never come up to London again, my dear."

"Oh, aunt, don't say that!"

"But I do say it, my dear. What should an old woman like me do, trailing up to town every year, merely because it 's what people choose to call the season?"

"To see your friends, of course. Age does n't matter when a person's health is so good as yours."

"If you knew what I suffer from lumbago,—though I must say coming to London always does cure that for the time. But as for friends——! Well, I suppose one has no right to complain when one gets to be as old as I am; but I declare I believe that those I love best would sooner be without me than with me."

"Do you mean me, aunt?"

"No, my dear, I don't mean you. Of course my life would have been very different if you could have consented to remain with me till you were married. But I did n't mean you. I don't know that I meant any one. You should n't mind what an old woman like me says."

"You 're a little melancholy because you 're going away."

"No, indeed. I don't know why I stayed the last

week. I did say to Lady Midlothian that I thought I should go on the 20th; and though I know that she knew that I really did n't go, she has not once sent to me since. To be sure they 've been out every night; but I thought she might have me to come and lunch. It 's so very lonely dining by myself in lodgings in London."

"And yet you never will come and dine with me."

"No, my dear; no. But we won't talk about that. I 've just one word more to say. Let me see. I 've just six minutes to stay. I 've made up my mind that I 'll never come up to town again,—except for one thing."

"And what 's that, aunt?" Alice, as she asked the question, well knew what that one thing was.

"I 'll come for your marriage, my dear. I do hope you will not keep me long waiting."

"Ah! I can't make any promise. There 's no knowing when that may be."

"And why should there be no knowing? I always think that when a girl is once engaged the sooner she 's married the better. There may be reasons for delay on the gentleman's part."

"There very often are, you know."

"But, Alice, you don't mean to say that Mr. Grey is putting it off?"

Alice was silent for a moment, during which Lady Macleod's face assumed a look of almost tragic horror. Was there something wrong on Mr. Grey's side of which she was altogether unaware? Alice, though for a second or two she had been guilty of a slight playful deceit, was too honest to allow the impression to remain. "No, aunt," she said; "Mr. Grey is not

putting it off. It has been left to me to fix the time."

"And why don't you fix it?"

"It is such a serious thing! After all it is not more than four months yet since I—I accepted him. I don't know that there has been any delay."

"But you might fix the time now, if he wishes it."

"Well, perhaps I shall,—some day, aunt. I 'm going to think about it, and you must n't drive me."

"But you should have some one to advise you, Alice."

"Ah! that 's just it. People always do seem to think it so terrible that a girl should have her own way in anything. She must n't like any one at first; and then, when she does like some one, she must marry him directly she 's bidden. I have n't much of my own way at present; but you see, when I 'm married I shan't have it at all. You can't wonder that I should n't be in a hurry."

"I am not advocating anything like hurry, my dear. But, goodness gracious me! I 've been here twenty-eight minutes, and that horrid man will impose upon me. Good-bye; God bless you! Mind you write." And Lady Macleod hurried out of the room more intent at the present moment upon saving her sixpence than she was on any other matter whatsoever.

And then John Grey came up to town, arriving a day or two after the time that he had fixed. It is not, perhaps, improbable that Alice had used some diplomatic skill in preventing a meeting between Lady Macleod and her lover. They both were very anxious to obtain the same object, and Alice was to some extent opposed to their views. Had Lady Macleod and

John Grey put their forces together she might have found herself unable to resist their joint endeavours. She was resolved that she would not at any rate name any day for her marriage before her return from Switzerland; and she may therefore have thought it wise to keep Mr. Grey in the country till after Lady Macleod had gone, even though she thereby cut down the time of his sojourn in London to four days. On the occasion of that visit Mr. Vavasor did a very memorable thing. He dined at home with the view of welcoming his future son-in-law. He dined at home, and asked, or rather assented to Alice's asking, George and Kate Vavasor to join the dinner-party. "What an auspicious omen for the future nuptials!" said Kate, with her little sarcastic smile. "Uncle John dines at home, and Mr. Grey joins in the dissipation of a dinner-party. We shall all be changed soon, I suppose, and George and I will take to keeping a little cottage in the country."

"Kate," said Alice angrily, "I think you are about the most unjust person I ever met. I would forgive your raillery, however painful it might be, if it were only fair."

"And to whom is it unfair on the present occasion; —to your father?"

"It was not intended for him."

"To yourself?"

"I care nothing as to myself; you know that very well."

"Then it must have been unfair to Mr. Grey."

"Yes; it was Mr. Grey whom you meant to attack. If I can forgive him for not caring for society, surely you might do so."

"Exactly; but that 's just what you can't do, my dear. You don't forgive him. If you did you might be quite sure that I should say nothing. And if you choose to bid me hold my tongue I will say nothing. But when you tell me all your own thoughts about this thing you can hardly expect but what I should let you know mine in return. I 'm not particular; and if you are ready for a little good, wholesome, useful hypocrisy, I won't balk you. I may n't be quite so dishonest as you call me, but I 'm not so wedded to truth but what I can look, and act, and speak a few falsehoods if you wish it. Only let us understand each other."

"You know I wish for no falsehood, Kate."

"I know it 's very hard to understand what you do wish. I know that for the last year or two I have been trying to find out your wishes, and, upon my word, my success has been very indifferent. I suppose you wish to marry Mr. Grey, but I 'm by no means certain. I suppose the last thing on earth you 'd wish would be to marry George."

"The very last. You 're right there at any rate."

"Alice——! sometimes you drive me too hard; you do, indeed. You make me doubt whether I hate or love you most. Knowing what my feelings are about George, I cannot understand how you can bring yourself to speak of him to me with such contempt!" Kate Vavasor, as she spoke these words, left the room with a quick step, and hurried up to her own chamber. There Alice found her in tears, and was driven by her friend's real grief into the expression of an apology, which she knew was not properly due from her. Kate was acquainted with all the circumstances of that old

affair between her brother and Alice. She had given in her adhesion to the propriety of what Alice had done. She had allowed that her brother George's behaviour had been such as to make any engagement between them impossible. The fault, therefore, had been hers in making any reference to the question of such a marriage. Nor had it been by any means her first fault of the same kind. Till Alice had become engaged to Mr. Grey she had spoken of George only as her brother, or as her friend's cousin, but now she was constantly making allusion to those past occurrences, which all of them should have striven to forget. Under these circumstances was not Lady Macleod right in saying that George Vavasor should not have been accepted as a companion for the Swiss tour?

The little dinner-party went off very quietly; and if no other ground existed for charging Mr. Grey with London dissipation than what that afforded, he was accused most unjustly. The two young men had never before met each other; and Vavasor had gone to his uncle's house, prepared not only to dislike but to despise his successor in Alice's favour. But in this he was either disappointed or gratified, as the case may be. "He has plenty to say for himself," he said to Kate on his way home.

"Oh yes; he can talk."

"And he does n't talk like a prig either, which was what I expected. He 's uncommonly handsome."

"I thought men never saw that in each other. I never see it in any man."

"I see it in every animal,—in men, women, horses, dogs, and even pigs. I like to look on handsome

things. I think people always do who are ugly themselves."

"And so you 're going into raptures in favour of John Grey."

"No, I 'm not. I very seldom go into raptures about anything. But he talks in the way I like a man to talk. How he bowled my uncle over about those actors; and yet if my uncle knows anything about anything it is about the stage twenty years ago." There was nothing more said then about John Grey; but Kate understood her brother well enough to be aware that this praise meant very little. George Vavasor spoke sometimes from his heart, and did so more frequently to his sister than to any one else; but his words came generally from his head.

On the day after the little dinner in Queen Anne Street, John Grey came to say good-bye to his betrothed;—for his betrothed she certainly was, in spite of those very poor arguments which she had used in trying to convince herself that she was still free if she wished to claim her freedom. Though he had been constantly with Alice during the last three days, he had not hitherto said anything as to the day of their marriage. He had been constantly with her alone, sitting for hours in that ugly green drawing-room, but he had never touched the subject. He had told her much of Switzerland, which she had never yet seen, but which he knew well. He had told her much of his garden and house, whither she had once gone with her father, whilst paying a visit nominally to the colleges at Cambridge. And he had talked of various matters, matters bearing in no immediate way upon his

own or her affairs; for Mr. Grey was a man who knew well how to make words pleasant; but previous to this last moment he had said nothing on that subject on which he was so intent.

"Well, Alice," he said, when the last hour had come, "and about that question of home affairs?"

"Let us finish off the foreign affairs first."

"We have finished them; have n't we?"

"Finished them! why we have n't started yet."

"No; you have n't started. But we 've had the discussion. Is there any reason why you 'd rather not have this thing settled?"

"No; no special reason."

"Then why not let it be fixed? Do you fear coming to me as my wife?"

"No."

"I cannot think that you repent your goodness to me."

"No; I don't repent it;—what you call my goodness! I love you too entirely for that."

"My darling!" And now he passed his arm round her waist as they stood near the empty fireplace. "And if you love me——"

"I do love you."

"Then why should you not wish to come to me?"

"I do wish it. I think I wish it."

"But, Alice, you must have wished it altogether when you consented to be my wife."

"A person may wish for a thing altogether, and yet not wish for it instantly."

"Instantly! Come; I have not been hard on you. This is still June. Will you say the middle of September, and we shall still be in time for warm pleas-

ant days among the lakes? Is that asking for too much?"

"It is not asking for anything."

"Nay, but it is, love. Grant it, and I will swear that you have granted me everything."

She was silent, having things to say but not knowing in what words to put them. Now that he was with her she could not say the things which she had told herself that she would utter to him. She could not bring herself to hint to him that his views of life were so unlike her own, that there could be no chance of happiness between them, unless each could strive to lean somewhat towards the other. No man could be more gracious in word and manner than John Grey; no man more chivalrous in his carriage towards a woman; but he always spoke and acted as though there could be no question that his manner of life was to be adopted, without a word or thought of doubting, by his wife. When two came together, why should not each yield something, and each claim something? This she had meant to say to him on this day; but now that he was with her she could not say it.

"John," she said at last, "do not press me about this till I return."

"But then you will say the time is short. It would be short then."

"I cannot answer you now;—indeed, I cannot. That is I cannot answer in the affirmative. It is such a solemn thing."

"Will it ever be less solemn, dearest?"

"Never, I hope never."

He did not press her further then, but kissed her and bade her farewell.

CHAPTER IV.

GEORGE VAVASOR, THE WILD MAN.

It will no doubt be understood that George Vavasor did not roam about in the woods unshorn, or wear leather trappings and sandals, like Robinson Crusoe, instead of coats and trousers. His wildness was of another kind. Indeed, I don't know that he was in truth at all wild, though Lady Macleod had called him so, and Alice had assented to her use of the word.

George Vavasor had lived in London since he was twenty, and now, at the time of the beginning of my story, he was a year or two over thirty. He was and ever had been the heir to his grandfather's estate; but that estate was small, and when George first came to London his father was a strong man of forty, with as much promise of life in him as his son had. A profession had therefore been absolutely necessary to him; and he had, at his Uncle John's instance, been placed in the office of a parliamentary land agent. With this parliamentary land agent he had quarrelled to the knife, but not before he had by his talents made himself so useful that he had before him the prospects of a lucrative partnership in the business. George Vavasor had many faults, but idleness—absolute idleness—was not one of them. He would occasionally postpone his work to pleasure. He would be at Newmarket when he should have been at Whitehall. But it was

not usual with him to be in bed when he should be at his desk, and when he was at his desk he did not whittle his ruler, or pick his teeth, or clip his nails. Upon the whole his friends were pleased with the first five years of his life in London—in spite of his having been found to be in debt on more than one occasion. But his debts had been paid; and all was going on swimmingly, when one day he knocked down the parliamentary agent with a blow between the eyes, and then there was an end of that. He himself was wont to say that he had known very well what he was about, that it had behoved him to knock down the man who was to have been his partner, and that he regretted nothing in the matter. At any rate the deed was looked upon with approving eyes by many men of good standing,—or, at any rate, sufficient standing to help George to another position; and within six weeks of the time of his leaving the office at Whitehall, he had become a partner in an established firm of wine merchants. A great-aunt had just then left him a couple of thousand pounds, which no doubt assisted him in his views with the wine merchants.

In this employment he remained for another period of five years, and was supposed by all his friends to be doing very well. And indeed he did not do badly, only that he did not do well enough to satisfy himself. He was ambitious of making the house to which he belonged the first house in the trade in London, and scared his partners by the boldness and extent of his views. He himself declared that if they would only have gone along with him he would have made them princes in the wine market. But they were men either of more prudence or of less audacity than him, and they

declined to walk in his courses. At the end of the five years Vavasor left the house, not having knocked any one down on this occasion, and taking with him a very nice sum of money.

The two last of these five years had certainly been the best period of his life, for he had really worked very hard, like a man, giving up all pleasure that took time from him,—and giving up also most pleasures which were dangerous on account of their costliness. He went to no races, played no billiards, and spoke of Cremorne as a childish thing, which he had abandoned now that he was no longer a child. It was during these two years that he had had his love passages with his cousin; and it must be presumed that he had, at any rate, intended at one time to settle himself respectably as a married man. He had, however, behaved very badly to Alice, and the match had been broken off.

He had also during the last two years quarrelled with his grandfather. He had wished to raise a sum of money on the Vavasor estate, which, as it was unentailed, he could only do with his grandfather's concurrence. The old gentleman would not hear of it,—would listen with no patience to the proposition. It was in vain that George attempted to make the squire understand that the wine business was going on very well, that he himself owed no man anything, that everything with him was flourishing;—but that his trade might be extended indefinitely by the use of a few thousand pounds at moderate interest. Old Mr. Vavasor was furious. No documents and no assurances could make him lay aside a belief that the wine merchants, and the business, and his grandson were all

ruined and ruinous together. No one but a ruined man would attempt to raise money on the family estate! So they had quarrelled, and had never spoken or seen each other since. "He shall have the estate for his life," the squire said to his son John. "I don't think I have a right to leave it away from him. It never has been left away from the heir. But I 'll tie it up so that he shan't cut a tree on it." John Vavasor perhaps thought that the old rule of primogeniture might under such circumstances have been judiciously abandoned—in this one instance, in his own favour. But he did not say so. Nor would he have said it had there been a chance of his doing so with success. He was a man from whom no very noble deed could be expected; but he was also one who would do no ignoble deed.

After that George Vavasor had become a stock-broker, and a stockbroker he was now. In the first twelve months after his leaving the wine business,—the same being the first year after his breach with Alice,—he had gone back greatly in the estimation of men. He had lived in open defiance of decency. He had spent much money and had apparently made none, and had been, as all his friends declared, on the high road to ruin. Aunt Macleod had taken her judgment from this period of his life when she had spoken of him as a man who never did anything. But he had come forth again suddenly as a working man; and now they who professed to know, declared that he was by no means poor. He was in the City every day; and during the last two years had earned the character of a shrewd fellow who knew what he was about, who might not perhaps be very mealy-mouthed in affairs of business, but who was fairly and decently honourable

in his money transactions. In fact, he stood well on 'Change.

And during these two years he had stood a contest for a seat in Parliament, having striven to represent the metropolitan borough of Chelsea, on the extremely radical interest. It is true that he had failed, and that he had spent a considerable sum of money in the contest. "Where on earth does your nephew get his money?" men said to John Vavasor at his club. "Upon my word I don't know," said Vavasor. "He does n't get it from me, and I 'm sure he does n't get it from my father." But George Vavasor, though he failed at Chelsea, did not spend his money altogether fruitlessly. He gained reputation by the struggle, and men came to speak of him as though he were one who would do something. He was a stockbroker, a thorough-going radical, and yet he was the heir to a fine estate, which had come down from father to son for four hundred years! There was something captivating about his history and adventures, especially as just at the time of the election he became engaged to an heiress, who died a month before the marriage should have taken place. She died without a will, and her money all went to some third cousins.

George Vavasor bore this last disappointment like a man, and it was at this time that he again became fully reconciled to his cousin. Previous to this they had met; and Alice, at her cousin Kate's instigation, had induced her father to meet him. But at first there had been no renewal of real friendship. Alice had given her cordial assent to her cousin's marriage with the heiress, Miss Grant, telling Kate that such an engagement was the very thing to put him thoroughly on his

feet. And then she had been much pleased by his spirit at that Chelsea election. "It was grand of him, was n't it?" said Kate, her eyes brimming full of tears. "It was very spirited," said Alice. "If you knew all, you would say so. They could get no one else to stand but that Mr. Travers, and he would n't come forward unless they would guarantee all his expenses." "I hope it don't cost George much," said Alice. "It did, though; nearly all he had got. But what matters? Money 's nothing to him, except for its uses. My own little mite is my own now, and he shall have every farthing of it for the next election, even though I should go out as a housemaid the next day." There must have been something great about George Vavasor, or he would not have been so idolised by such a girl as his sister Kate.

Early in the present spring, before the arrangements for the Swiss journey were made, George Vavasor had spoken to Alice about that intended marriage which had been broken off by the lady's death. He was sitting one evening with his cousin in the drawing-room in Queen Anne Street, waiting for Kate, who was to join him there before going to some party. I wonder whether Kate had had a hint from her brother to be late! At any rate, the two were together for an hour, and the talk had been all about himself. He had congratulated her on her engagement with Mr. Grey, which had just become known to him, and had then spoken of his own last intended marriage.

"I grieved for her," he said, "greatly."

"I 'm sure you did, George."

"Yes, I did;—for her, herself. Of course the world has given me credit for lamenting the loss of her

money. But the truth is, that as regards both herself and her money, it is much better for me that we were never married."

"Do you mean even though she should have lived?"

"Yes;—even had she lived."

"And why so? If you liked her, her money was surely no drawback."

"No; not if I had liked her."

"And did you not like her?"

"No."

"Oh, George!"

"I did not love her as a man should love his wife, if you mean that. As for my liking her, I did like her. I liked her very much."

"But you would have loved her?"

"I don't know. I don't find that task of loving so very easy. It might have been that I should have learned to hate her."

"If so, it is better for you, and better for her, that she has gone."

"It is better. I am sure of it. And yet I grieve for her, and in thinking of her I almost feel as though I were guilty of her death."

"But she never suspected that you did not love her?"

"Oh no. But she was not given to think much of such things. She took all that for granted. Poor girl! she is at rest now, and her money has gone, where it should go, among her own relatives."

"Yes; with such feelings as yours are about her, her money would have been a burden to you."

"I would not have taken it. I hope, at least, that I would not have taken it. Money is a sore tempta-

tion, especially to a poor man like me. It is well for me that the trial did not come in my way."

"But you are not such a very poor man now, are you, George? I thought your business was a good one."

"It is, and I have no right to be a poor man. But a man will be poor who does such mad things as I do. I had three or four thousand pounds clear, and I spent every shilling of it on the Chelsea election. Goodness knows whether I shall have a shilling at all when another chance comes round; but if I have I shall certainly spend it, and if I have not, I shall go in debt wherever I can raise a hundred pounds."

"I hope you will be successful at last."

"I feel sure that I shall. But, in the meantime, I cannot but know that my career is perfectly reckless. No woman ought to join her lot to mine unless she has within her courage to be as reckless as I am. You know what men do when they toss up for shillings?"

"Yes, I suppose I do."

"I am tossing up every day of my life for every shilling that I have."

"Do you mean that you 're—gambling?"

"No. I have given that up altogether. I used to gamble, but I never do that now, and never shall again. What I mean is this,—that I hold myself in readiness to risk everything at any moment, in order to gain any object that may serve my turn. I am always ready to lead a forlorn hope. That 's what I mean by tossing up every day for every shilling that I have."

Alice did not quite understand him, and perhaps he did not intend that she should. Perhaps his object was to mystify her imagination. She did not understand

him, but I fear that she admired the kind of courage which he professed. And he had not only professed it: in that matter of the past election he had certainly practised it.

In talking of beauty to his sister he had spoken of himself as being ugly. He would not generally have been called ugly by women, had not one side of his face been dreadfully scarred by a cicatrice, which in healing had left a dark indented line down from his left eye to his lower jaw. That black ravine running through his cheek was certainly ugly. On some occasions, when he was angry or disappointed, it was very hideous; for he would so contort his face that the scar would, as it were, stretch itself out, revealing all its horrors, and his countenance would become all scar. "He looked at me like the devil himself—making the hole in his face gape at me," the old squire had said to John Vavasor in describing the interview in which the grandson had tried to bully his grandfather into assenting to his own views about the mortgage. But in other respects George's face was not ugly, and might have been thought handsome by many women. His hair was black, and was parted in the front. His forehead, though low, was broad. His eyes were dark and bright, and his eyebrows were very full, and perfectly black. At those periods of his anger, all his face which was not scar was eye and eyebrow. He wore a thick black moustache, which covered his mouth, but no whiskers. People said of him that he was so proud of his wound that he would not grow a hair to cover it. The fact, however, was that no whisker could be made to come sufficiently forward to be of service, and therefore he wore none.

The story of that wound should be told. When he was yet hardly more than a boy, before he had come up to London, he was living in a house in the country which his father then occupied. At the time his father was absent, and he and his sister only were in the house with the maid-servants. His sister had a few jewels in her room, and an exaggerated report of them having come to the ears of certain enterprising burglars, a little plan was arranged for obtaining them. A small boy was hidden in the house, a window was opened, and at the proper witching hour of night a stout individual crept upstairs in his stocking-feet, and was already at Kate Vavasor's door,—when, in the dark, dressed only in his night-shirt, wholly unarmed, George Vavasor flew at the fellow's throat. Two hours elapsed before the horror-stricken women of the house could bring men to the place. George's face had then been ripped open from the eye downwards, with some chisel, or house-breaking instrument. But the man was dead. George had wrenched from him his own tool, and having first jobbed him all over with insufficient wounds, had at last driven the steel through his windpipe. The small boy escaped, carrying with him two shillings and three-pence which Kate had left upon the drawing-room mantelpiece.

George Vavasor was rather low in stature, but well made, with small hands and feet, but broad in the chest and strong in the loins. He was a fine horseman and a hard rider; and men who had known him well said that he could fence and shoot with a pistol as few men care to do in these peaceable days. Since volunteering had come up, he had become a captain of Volunteers, and had won prizes with his rifle at Wimbledon.

Such had been the life of George Vavasor, and such was his character, and such his appearance. He had always lived alone in London, and did so at present; but just now his sister was much with him, as she was staying up in town with an aunt, another Vavasor by birth, with whom the reader will, if he persevere, become acquainted in course of time. I hope he will persevere a little, for of all the Vavasors Mrs. Greenow was perhaps the best worth knowing. But Kate Vavasor's home was understood to be in her grandfather's house in Westmoreland.

On the evening before they started for Switzerland, George and Kate walked from Queen Anne Street, where they had been dining with Alice, to Mrs. Greenow's house. Everything had been settled about luggage, hours of starting, and routes as regarded their few first days; and the common purse had been made over to George. That portion of Mr. Grey's letter had been read which alluded to the Paynims and the glasses of water, and everything had passed in the best of good-humour. "I 'll endeavour to get the cold water for you," George had said; "but as to the breakfasts, I can only hope you won't put me to severe trials by any very early hours. When people go out for pleasure it should be pleasure."

The brother and sister walked through two or three streets in silence, and then Kate asked a question.

"George, I wonder what your wishes really are about Alice?"

"That she should n't want her breakfast too early while we are away."

"That means that I 'm to hold my tongue, of course."

"No, it does n't."

"Then it means that you intend to hold yours."

"No; not that either."

"Then what does it mean?"

"That I have no fixed wishes on the subject. Of course she 'll marry this man John Grey, and then no one will hear another word about her."

"She will, no doubt, if you don't interfere. Probably she will whether you interfere or not. But if you wish to interfere——"

"She 's got four hundred a year, and is not so good-looking as she was."

"Yes; she has got four hundred a year, and she is more handsome now than ever she was. I know that you think so;—and that you love her and love no one else—unless you have a sneaking fondness for me."

"I 'll leave you to judge of that last."

"And as for me,—I only love two people in the world; her and you. If ever you mean to try, you should try now."

CHAPTER V.

THE BALCONY AT BASLE.

I AM not going to describe the Vavasors' Swiss tour. It would not be fair on my readers. "Six Weeks in the Bernese Oberland, by a Party of Three," would have but very small chance of success in the literary world at present, and I should consider myself to be dishonest if I attempted to palm off such matter on the public in the pages of a novel. It is true that I have just returned from Switzerland, and should find such a course of writing very convenient. But I dismiss the temptation, strong as it is. Retro age, Satanas. No living man or woman any longer wants to be told anything of the Grimsel or of the Gemmi. Ludgate Hill is now-a-days more interesting than the Jungfrau.

The Vavasors were not very energetic on their tour. As George had said, they had gone out for pleasure and not for work. They went direct to Interlacken and then hung about between that place and Grindelwald and Lauterbrunnen. It delighted him to sit still on some outer bench, looking at the mountains, with a cigar in his mouth, and it seemed to delight them to be with him. Much that Mr. Grey prophesied had come true. The two girls were ministers to him, instead of having him as their slave.

"What fine fellows those Alpine club men think

themselves," he said on one of these occasions, "and how thoroughly they despise the sort of enjoyment I get from mountains. But they 're mistaken."

"I don't see why either need be mistaken," said Alice.

"But they are mistaken," he continued. "They rob the mountains of their poetry, which is or should be their greatest charm. Mont Blanc can have no mystery for a man who has been up it half-a-dozen times. It 's like getting behind the scenes at a ballet, or making a conjuror explain his tricks."

"But is the exercise nothing?" said Kate.

"Yes; the exercise is very fine;—but that avoids the question."

"And they all botanise," said Alice.

"I don't believe it. I believe that the most of them simply walk up the mountain and down again. But if they did, that avoids the question also. The poetry and mystery of the mountains are lost to those who make themselves familiar with their details, not the less because such familiarity may have useful results. In this world things are beautiful only because they are not quite seen, or not perfectly understood. Poetry is precious chiefly because it suggests more than it declares. Look in there, through that valley, where you just see the distant little peak at the end. Are you not dreaming of the unknown beautiful world that exists up there;—beautiful, as heaven is beautiful, because you know nothing of the reality? If you make your way up there and back to-morrow, and find out all about it, do you mean to say that it will be as beautiful to you when you come back?"

"Yes;—I think it would," said Alice.

"Then you 've no poetry in you. Now I 'm made up of poetry." After that they began to laugh at him and were very happy.

I think that Mr. Grey was right in answering Alice's letter as he did; but I think that Lady Macleod was also right in saying that Alice should not have gone to Switzerland in company with George Vavasor. A peculiar familiarity sprang up, which, had all its circumstances been known to Mr. Grey, would not have entirely satisfied him, even though no word was said which might in itself have displeased him. During the first weeks of their travelling no word was said which would have displeased him; but at last, when the time for their return was drawing nigh, when their happiness was nearly over, and that feeling of melancholy was coming on them which always pervades the last hours of any period that has been pleasant,—then words became softer than they had been, and references were made to old days,—allusions which never should have been permitted between them.

Alice had been very happy,—more happy perhaps in that she had been a joint minister with Kate to her cousin George's idle fantasies, than she would have been hurrying about with him as her slave. They had tacitly agreed to spoil him with comforts; and girls are always happier in spoiling some man than in being spoiled by men. And he had taken it all well, doing his despotism pleasantly, exacting much, but exacting nothing that was disagreeable. And he had been amusing always, as Alice thought without any effort. But men and women, when they show themselves at their best, seldom do so without an effort. If the object be near the heart the effort will be pleasant to

him who makes it, and if it be made well, it will be hidden; but, not the less, will the effort be there. George Vavasor had on the present occasion done his very best to please his cousin.

They were sitting at Basle one evening in the balcony of the big hotel which overlooks the Rhine. This big hotel is always full of tourists who are either just beginning or just completing their Swiss doings. The balcony runs the length of the house, and is open to all the company; but it is spacious, and little parties can be formed there with perfect privacy. The swift broad Rhine runs underneath, rushing through from the bridge which here spans the river; and every now and then on summer evenings loud shouts come up from strong swimmers in the water, who are glorying in the swiftness of the current. The three were sitting there, by themselves, at the end of the balcony. Coffee was before them on a little table, and George's cigar, as usual, was in his mouth.

"It 's nearly all over," said he, after they had remained silent for some minutes.

"And I do think it has been a success," said Kate. "Always excepting about the money. I 'm ruined forever."

"I 'll make your money all straight," said George.

"Indeed you 'll do nothing of the kind," said Kate. "I 'm ruined, but you are ruineder. But what signifies? It is such a great thing ever to have had six weeks' happiness, that the ruin is, in point of fact, a good speculation. What do you say, Alice? Won't you vote, too, that we 've done it well?"

"I think we 've done it very well. I have enjoyed myself thoroughly."

"And now you 've got to go home to John Grey and Cambridgeshire! It 's no wonder you should be melancholy." That was the thought in Kate's mind, but she did not speak it out on this occasion.

"That 's good of you, Alice," said Kate. "Is it not, George? I like a person who will give a hearty meed of approbation."

"But I am giving the meed of approbation to myself."

"I like a person even to do that heartily," said Kate. "Not that George and I are thankful for the compliment. We are prepared to admit that we owe almost everything to you,—are we not, George?"

"I 'm not; by any means," said George.

"Well, I am, and I expect to have something pretty said to me in return. Have I been cross once, Alice?"

"No; I don't think you have. You are never cross, though you are often ferocious."

"But I have n't been once ferocious,—nor has George."

"He would have been the most ungrateful man alive if he had," said Alice. "We 've done nothing since we 've started but realise for him that picture in 'Punch' of the young gentleman at Jeddo who had a dozen ladies to wait upon him."

"And now he has got to go home to his lodgings, and wait upon himself again. Poor fellow! I do pity you, George."

"No, you don't;—nor does Alice. I believe girls always think that a bachelor in London has the happiest of all lives. It 's because they think so that they generally want to put an end to the man's condition."

"It 's envy that makes us want to get married,—not love," said Kate.

"It 's the devil in some shape, as often as not," said he. "With a man, marriage always seems to him to be an evil at the instant."

"Not always," said Alice.

"Almost always;—but he does it, as he takes physic, because something worse will come if he don't. A man never likes having his tooth pulled out, but all men do have their teeth pulled out,—and they who delay it too long suffer the very mischief."

"I do like George's philosophy," said Kate, getting up from her chair as she spoke; "it is so sharp, and has such a pleasant acid taste about it; and then we all know that it means nothing. Alice, I 'm going up-stairs to begin the final packing."

"I 'll come with you, dear."

"No, don't. To tell the truth I 'm only going into that man's room because he won't put up a single thing of his own decently. We 'll do ours, of course, when we go up to bed. Whatever you disarrange to-night, Master George, you must rearrange for yourself to-morrow morning, for I promise I won't go into your room at five o'clock."

"How I do hate that early work," said George.

"I 'll be down again very soon," said Kate. "Then we 'll take one turn on the bridge and go to bed."

Alice and George were left together sitting in the balcony. They had been alone together before many times since their travels had commenced; but they both of them felt that there was something to them in the present moment different from any other period of

their journey. There was something that each felt to be sweet, undefinable, and dangerous. Alice had known that it would be better for her to go upstairs with Kate; but Kate's answer had been of such a nature that had she gone she would have shown that she had some special reason for going. Why should she show such a need? Or why, indeed, should she entertain it?

Alice was seated quite at the end of the gallery, and Kate's chair was at her feet in the corner. When Alice and Kate had seated themselves, the waiter had brought a small table for the coffee-cups, and George had placed his chair on the other side of that. So that Alice was, as it were, a prisoner. She could not slip away without some special preparation for going, and Kate had so placed her chair in leaving, that she must actually have asked George to move it before she could escape. But why should she wish to escape? Nothing could be more lovely and enticing than the scene before her. The night had come on, with quick but still unperceived approach, as it does in those parts; for the twilight there is not prolonged as it is with us more northern folk. The night had come on, but there was a rising moon, which just sufficed to give a sheen to the water beneath her. The air was deliciously soft;—of that softness which produces no sensation either of warmth or cold, but which just seems to touch one with loving tenderness, as though the unseen spirits of the air kissed one's forehead as they passed on their wings. The Rhine was running at her feet, so near, that in the soft half light it seemed as though she might step into its ripple. The Rhine was running by with that delicious sound of rapidly

moving waters, that fresh refreshing gurgle of the river, which is so delicious to the ear at all times. If you be talking, it wraps up your speech, keeping it for yourselves, making it difficult neither to her who listens nor to him who speaks. If you would sleep, it is of all lullabies the sweetest. If you are alone and would think, it aids all your thoughts. If you are alone, and, alas! would not think,—if thinking be too painful,—it will dispel your sorrow, and give the comfort which music alone can give. Alice felt that the air kissed her, that the river sang for her its sweetest song, that the moon shone for her with its softest light,—that light which lends the poetry of half-developed beauty to everything that it touches. Why should she leave it?

Nothing was said for some minutes after Kate's departure, and Alice was beginning to shake from her that half feeling of danger which had come over her. Vavasor had sat back in his chair, leaning against the house, with his feet raised upon a stool; his arms were folded across his breast, and he seemed to have divided himself between his thoughts and his cigar. Alice was looking full upon the river, and her thoughts had strayed away to her future home among John Grey's flower-bed and shrubs; but the river, though it sang to her pleasantly, seemed to sing a song of other things than such a home as that,—a song full of mystery, as are all river songs when one tries to understand their words.

"When are you to be married, Alice?" said George at last.

"Oh, George!" said she. "You ask me a question as though you were putting a pistol to my ear."

"I 'm sorry the question was so unpleasant."

"I did n't say that it was unpleasant; but you asked it so suddenly! The truth is, I did n't expect you to speak at all just then. I suppose I was thinking of something."

"But if it be not unpleasant,—when are you to be married?"

"I do not know. It is not fixed."

"But about when, I mean? This summer?"

"Certainly not this summer, for the summer will be over when we reach home."

"This winter? Next spring? Next year?—or in ten years' time?"

"Before the expiration of the ten years, I suppose. Anything more exact than that I can't say."

"I suppose you like it?" he then said.

"What; being married? You see I 've never tried yet."

"The idea of it,—the anticipation. You look forward with satisfaction to the kind of life you will lead at Nethercoats? Don't suppose I am saying anything against it, for I have no conception what sort of a place Nethercoats is. On the whole I don't know that there is any kind of life better than that of an English country gentleman in his own place;—that is, if he can keep it up, and not live as the old squire does, in a state of chronic poverty."

"Mr. Grey's place does n't entitle him to be called a country gentleman."

"But you like the prospect of it?"

"Oh, George, how you do cross-question one! Of course I like it, or I should n't have accepted it."

"That does not follow. But I quite acknowledge that I have no right to cross-question you. If I ever had such right on the score of cousinship, I have lost it on the score of——; but we won't mind that, will we, Alice?" To this she at first made no answer, but he repeated the question. "Will we, Alice?"

"Will we what?"

"Recur to the old days."

"Why should we recur to them? They are passed, and as we are again friends and dear cousins the sting of them is gone."

"Ah, yes! The sting of them is gone. It is for that reason, because it is so, that we may at last recur to them without danger. If we regret nothing,—if neither of us has anything to regret, why not recur to them, and talk of them freely?"

"No, George; that would not do."

"By heavens, no! It would drive me mad; and if I know aught of you, it would hardly leave you as calm as you are at present."

"As I would wish to be left calm——"

"Would you? Then I suppose I ought to hold my tongue. But, Alice, I shall never have the power of speaking to you again as I speak now. Since we have been out together, we have been dear friends; is it not so?"

"And shall we not always be dear friends?"

"No, certainly not. How will it be possible? Think of it. How can I really be your friend when you are the mistress of that man's house in Cambridgeshire?"

"George!"

"I mean nothing disrespectful. I truly beg your pardon if it has seemed so. Let me say that gentleman's house;—for he is a gentleman."

"That he certainly is."

"You could not have accepted him were he not so. But how can I be your friend when you are his wife? I may still call you Cousin Alice, and pat your children on the head if I chance to see them; and shall stop in the streets and shake hands with him if I meet him;—that is if my untoward fate does not induce him to cut my acquaintance;—but as for friendship, that will be over when you and I shall have parted next Thursday evening at London Bridge."

"Oh, George, don't say so!"

"But I do."

"And why on Thursday? Do you mean that you won't come to Queen Anne Street any more?"

"Yes, that is what I do mean. This trip of ours has been very successful, Kate says. Perhaps Kate knows nothing about it."

"It has been very pleasant,—at least to me."

"And the pleasure has had no drawback?"

"None to me."

"It has been very pleasant to me, also;—but the pleasure has had its alloy. Alice, I have nothing to ask from you,—nothing."

"Anything that you should ask, I would do for you."

"I have nothing to ask;—nothing. But I have one word to say."

"George, do not say it. Let me go upstairs. Let me go to Kate."

"Certainly; if you wish it you shall go." He still held his foot against the chair which barred her pas-

sage, and did not attempt to rise as he must have done to make way for her passage out. "Certainly you shall go to Kate, if you refuse to hear me. But after all that has passed between us, after these six weeks of intimate companionship, I think you ought to listen to me. I tell you that I have nothing to ask. I am not going to make love to you."

Alice had commenced some attempt to rise, but she had again settled herself in her chair. And now, when he paused for a moment, she made no further sign that she wished to escape, nor did she say a word to intimate her further wish that he should be silent.

"I am not going to make love to you," he said again. "As for making love, as the word goes, that must be over between you and me. It has been made and marred, and cannot be remade. It may exist, or it may have been expelled; but where it does not exist, it will never be brought back again."

"It should not be spoken of between you and me."

"So, no doubt, any proper-going duenna would say, and so, too, little children should be told; but between you and me there can be no necessity for falsehood. We have grown beyond our sugar-toothed ages, and are now man and woman. I perfectly understood your breaking away from me. I understood you, and in spite of my sorrow knew that you were right. I am not going to accuse or to defend myself; but I knew that you were right."

"Then let there be no more about it."

"Yes; there must be more about it. I did not understand you when you accepted Mr. Grey. Against him I have not a whisper to make. He may be perfect for aught I know. But, knowing you as I thought I

did, I could not understand your loving such a man as him. It was as though one who had lived on brandy should take himself suddenly to a milk diet,—and enjoy the change! A milk diet is no doubt the best. But men who have lived on brandy can't make those changes very suddenly. They perish in the attempt."

"Not always, George."

"It may be done with months of agony;—but there was no such agony with you."

"Who can tell?"

"But you will tell me the cure was made. I thought so, and therefore thought that I should find you changed. I thought that you, who had been all fire, would now have turned yourself into soft-flowing milk and honey, and have become fit for the life in store for you. With such a one I might have travelled from Moscow to Malta without danger! The woman fit to be John Grey's wife would certainly do me no harm,—could not touch my happiness. I might have loved her once,—might still love the memory of what she had been; but her, in her new form, after her new birth,—such a one as that, Alice, could be nothing to me. Don't mistake me. I have enough of wisdom in me to know how much better, ay, and happier, a woman she might be. It was not that I thought you had descended in the scale; but I gave you credit for virtues which you have not acquired. Alice, that wholesome diet of which I spoke is not your diet. You would starve on it, and perish."

He had spoken with great energy, but still in a low voice, having turned full round upon the table, with both his arms upon it, and his face stretched out far over towards her. She was looking full at him; and, as I have

said before, that scar and his gloomy eyes and thick eyebrows seemed to make up the whole of his face. But the scar had never been ugly to her. She knew the story, and when he was her lover she had taken pride in the mark of the wound. She looked at him, but though he paused she did not speak. The music of the river was still in her ears, and there came upon her a struggle as though she were striving to understand its song. Were the waters also telling her of the mistake she had made in accepting Mr. Grey as her husband? What her cousin was now telling her,—was it not a repetition of words which she had spoken to herself hundreds of times during the last two months? Was she not telling herself daily,—hourly,—always,—in every thought of her life, that in accepting Mr. Grey she had assumed herself to be mistress of virtues which she did not possess? Had she not, in truth, rioted upon brandy, till the innocence of milk was unfitted for her? This man now came and rudely told her all this,—but did he not tell her the truth? She sat silent and convicted; only gazing into his face when his speech was done.

"I have learned this since we have been again together, Alice; and finding you, not the angel I had supposed, finding you to be the same woman I had once loved,—the safety that I anticipated has not fallen to my lot. That 's all. Here 's Kate, and now we 'll go for our walk."

CHAPTER VI.

THE BRIDGE OVER THE RHINE.

"GEORGE," said Kate, speaking before she quite got up to them, "will you tell me whether you have been preparing all your things for an open sale by auction?" Then she stole a look at Alice, and having learned from that glance that something had occurred which prevented Alice from joining her in her raillery, she went on with it herself rapidly, as though to cover Alice's confusion and give her time to rally before they should all move. "Would you believe it? he had three razors laid out on his table——"

"A man must shave,—even at Basle."

"But not with three razors at once; and three hair-brushes, and half-a-dozen tooth-brushes, and a small collection of combs, and four or five little glass bottles, looking as though they contained poison,—all with silver tops. I can only suppose you desired to startle the weak mind of the chambermaid. I have put them all up; but remember this, if they are taken out again you are responsible. And I will not put up your boots, George. What can you have wanted with three pairs of boots at Basle?"

"When you have completed the list of my wardrobe we 'll go out upon the bridge. That is, if Alice likes it."

"Oh yes; I shall like it."

"Come along then," said Kate. And so they moved away.

When they got upon the bridge Alice and Kate were together, while George strolled behind them, close to them, but not taking any part in their conversation,—as though he had merely gone with them as an escort. Kate seemed to be perfectly content with this arrangement, chattering to Alice, so that she might show that there was nothing serious on the minds of any of them. It need hardly be said that Alice at this time made no appeal to George to join them. He followed them at their heels, with his hands behind his back, looking down upon the pavement and simply waiting upon their pleasure.

"Do you know," said Kate, "I have a very great mind to run away."

"Where do you want to run to?"

"Well;—that would n't much signify. Perhaps I 'd go to the little inn at Handek. It 's a lonely place, where nobody would hear of me,—and I should have the waterfall. I 'm afraid they 'd want to have their bill paid. That would be the worst of it."

"But why run away just now?"

"I won't, because you would n't like going home with George alone,—and I suppose he 'd be bound to look after me, as he 's doing now. I wonder what he thinks of having to walk over the bridge after us girls. I suppose he 'd be in that place down there drinking beer, if we were n't here."

"If he wanted to go, I dare say he would, in spite of us."

"That 's ungrateful of you, for I 'm sure we 've

never been kept in a moment by his failing us. But as I was saying, I do dread going home. You are going to John Grey, which may be pleasant enough; but I 'm going—to Aunt Greenow."

"It 's your own choice."

"No, it 's not. I have n't any choice in the matter. Of course I might refuse to speak to Aunt Greenow, and nobody could make me;—but practically I have n't any choice in the matter. Fancy a month at Yarmouth with no companion but such a woman as that!"

"I should n't mind it. Aunt Greenow always seems to me to be a very good sort of woman."

"She may be a good woman, but I must say I think she 's of a bad sort. You 've never heard her talk about her husband?"

"No, never; I think she did cry a little the first day she came to Queen Anne Street, but that was n't unnatural."

"He was thirty years older than herself."

"But still he was her husband. And even if her tears are assumed, what of that? What 's a woman to do? Of course she was wrong to marry him. She was twenty-five, and had nothing, while he was sixty-five, and was very rich. According to all accounts she made him a very good wife, and now that she 's got all his money, you would n't have her go about laughing within three months of his death."

"No; I would n't have her laugh; but neither would I have her cry. And she 's quite right to wear weeds; but she need n't be so very outrageous in the depth of her hems, or so very careful that her caps are becoming. Her eyes will be worn out by their double service. They are always red with weeping, and yet

she is ready every minute with a full battery of execution for any man that she sees."

"Then why have you consented to go to Yarmouth with her?"

"Just because she 's got forty thousand pounds. If Mr. Greenow had left her with a bare maintenance I don't suppose I should ever have held out my hand to her."

"Then you 're as bad as she is."

"Quite as bad;—and that 's what makes me want to run away. But it is n't my own fault altogether. It 's the fault of the world at large. Does anybody ever drop their rich relatives? When she proposed to take me to Yarmouth, was n't it natural that the squire should ask me to go? When I told George, was n't it natural that he should say, 'Oh, go by all means. She 's got forty thousand pounds!' One can't pretend to be wiser or better than one's relatives. And after all, what can I expect from her money?"

"Nothing, I should say."

"Not a halfpenny. I 'm nearly thirty and she 's only forty, and of course she 'll marry again. I will say of myself, too, that no person living cares less for money."

"I should think no one."

"Yet one sticks to one's rich relatives. It 's the way of the world." Then she paused a moment. "But shall I tell you, Alice, why I do stick to her? Perhaps you 'll think the object as mean as though I wanted her money myself."

"Why is it?"

"Because it is on the cards that she may help George in his career. I do not want money, but he may. And for such purposes as his, I think it fair that all the

family should contribute. I feel sure that he would make a name for himself in Parliament; and if I had my way I would spend every shilling of Vavasor money in putting him there. When I told the squire so I thought he would have eaten me. I really did think he would have turned me out of the house."

"And serve you right too after what had happened."

"I did n't care. Let him turn me out. I was determined he should know what I thought. He swore at me; and then he was so unhappy at what he had done that he came and kissed me that night in my bedroom, and gave me a ten-pound note. What do you think I did with it? I sent it as a contribution to the next election, and George has it now locked up in a box. Don't you tell him that I told you."

Then they stopped and leaned for a while over the parapet of the bridge. "Come here, George," said Kate; and she made room for him between herself and Alice. "Would n't you like to be swimming down there as those boys were doing when we went out into the balcony? The water looks so enticing."

"I can't say I should;—unless it might be a pleasant way of swimming into the next world."

"I should so like to feel myself going with the stream," said Kate; "particularly by this light. I can't fancy in the least that I should be drowned."

"I can't fancy anything else," said Alice.

"It would be so pleasant to feel the water gliding along one's limbs, and to be carried away headlong,—knowing that you were on the direct road to Rotterdam."

"And so arrive there without your clothes," said George.

"They would be brought after in a boat. Did n't you see that those boys had a boat with them? But if I lived here, I 'd never do it except by moonlight. The water looks so clear and bright now, and the rushing sound of it is so soft! The sea at Yarmouth won't be anything like that, I suppose."

Neither of them any longer answered her, and yet she went on talking about the river, and their aunt, and her prospects at Yarmouth. Neither of them answered her, and yet it seemed that they had not a word to say to each other. But still they stood there looking down upon the river, and every now and then Kate's voice was to be heard, preventing the feeling which might otherwise have arisen that their hearts were too full for speech.

At last Alice seemed to shiver. There was a slight trembling in her arms, which George felt rather than saw. "You are cold," he said.

"No, indeed."

"If you are let us go in. I thought you shivered with the night air."

"It was n't that. I was thinking of something. Don't you ever think of things that make you shiver?"

"Indeed I do, very often;—so often that I have to do my shiverings inwardly. Otherwise people would think I had the palsy."

"I don't mean things of moment," said Alice. "Little bits of things make me do it;—perhaps a word that I said and ought not to have said ten years ago;—the most ordinary little mistakes, even my own past

thoughts to myself about the merest trifles. They are always making me shiver."

"It 's not because you have committed any murder, then."

"No; but it 's my conscience all the same, I suppose."

"Ah! I 'm not so good as you. I doubt it 's not my conscience at all. When I think of a chance I 've let go by, as I have thousands, then it is that I shiver. But, as I tell you, I shiver inwardly. I 've been in one long shiver ever since we came out because of one chance that I let go by. Come, we 'll go in. We 've to be up at five o'clock, and now it 's eleven. I 'll do the rest of my shivering in bed."

"Are you tired of being out?" said Kate, when the other two began to move.

"Not tired of being out, but George reminds me that we have to be up at five."

"I wish George would hold his tongue. We can't come to the bridge at Basle every night in our lives. If one found one's self at the top of Sinai I 'm afraid the first feeling would be one of fear lest one would n't be down in time to dress for dinner. Are you aware, George, that the king of rivers is running beneath your feet, and that the moon is shining with a brilliance you never see at home?"

"I 'll stay here all night if you 'll put off going to-morrow," said George.

"Our money would n't hold out," said Kate.

"Don't talk about Sinai any more after that," said he, "but let 's go in to bed."

They walked across the bridge back to the hotel in the same manner as before, the two girls going together with the young man after them, and so they went up

the front steps of the hotel, through the hall, and on to the stairs. Here George handed Alice her candle, and as he did so he whispered a few words to her. "My shivering fit has to come yet," said he, "and will last me the whole night." She would have given much to have been able to answer him lightly, as though what he had said had meant nothing;—but she could n't do it; the light speech would not come to her. She was conscious of all this, and went away to her own room without answering him at all. Here she sat down at the window looking out upon the river till Kate should join her. Their rooms opened through from one to the other, and she would not begin her packing till her cousin should come.

But Kate had gone with her brother, promising, as she did so, that she would be back in half a minute. That half-minute was protracted beyond half an hour. "If you 'll take my advice," said Kate, at last, standing up with her candle in her hand, "you 'll ask her in plain words to give you another chance. Do it to-morrow at Strasbourg; you 'll never have a better opportunity."

"And bid her throw John Grey over!"

"Don't say anything about John Grey; leave her to settle that matter with herself. Believe me that she has quite courage enough to dispose of John Grey, if she has courage enough to accept your offer."

"Kate, you women never understand each other. If I were to do that, all her most powerful feelings would be arrayed in arms against me. I must leave her to find out first that she wishes to be rid of her engagement."

"She has found that out long ago. Do you think I

don't know what she wishes? But if you can't bring yourself to speak to her, she 'll marry him in spite of her wishes."

"Bring myself! I 've never been very slow in bringing myself to speak to any one when there was need. It is n't very pleasant sometimes, but I do it, if I find occasion."

"But surely it must be pleasant with her. You must be glad to find that she still loves you. You still love her, I suppose?"

"Upon my word I don't know."

"Don't provoke me, George. I 'm moving heaven and earth to bring you two together; but if I did n't think you loved her, I 'd go to her at once and bid her never see you again."

"Upon my word, Kate, I sometimes think it would be better if you 'd leave heaven and earth alone."

"Then I will. But of all human beings, surely you 're the most ungrateful."

"Why should n't she marry John Grey if she likes him?"

"But she does n't like him. And I hate him. I hate the sound of his voice, and the turn of his eye, and that slow, steady movement of his,—as though he was always bethinking himself that he would n't wear out his clothes."

"I don't see that your hating him ought to have anything to do with it."

"If you 're going to preach morals, I 'll leave you. It 's the darling wish of my heart that she should be your wife. If you ever loved anybody,—and I sometimes doubt whether you ever did,—but if you did, you loved her."

"Did and do are different things."

"Very well, George; then I have done. It has been the same in every twist and turn of my life. In everything that I have striven to do for you, you have thrown yourself over, in order that I might be thrown over too. But I believe you say this merely to vex me."

"Upon my word, Kate, I think you 'd better go to bed."

"But not till I 've told her everything. I won't leave her to be deceived and ill-used again."

"Who is ill using her now? Is it not the worst of ill usage, trying to separate her from that man?"

"No;—if I thought so, I would have no hand in doing it. She would be miserable with him, and make him miserable as well. She does not really love him. He loves her, but I 've nothing to do with that. It 's nothing to me if he breaks his heart."

"I shall break mine if you don't let me go to bed."

With that she went away and hurried along the corridor, till she came to her cousin's room. She found Alice still seated at the window, or rather kneeling on the chair, with her head out through the lattice. "Why, you lazy creature," said Kate; "I declare, you have n't touched a thing."

"You said we 'd do it together."

"But he has kept me. Oh, what a man he is! If he ever does get married, what will his wife do with him?"

"I don't think he ever will," said Alice.

"Don't you? I dare say you understand him better than I do. Sometimes I think that the only thing wanting to make him thoroughly good is a wife. But

it is n't every woman that would do for him. And the woman who marries him should have high courage. There are moments with him when he is very wild; but he never is cruel and never hard. Is Mr. Grey ever hard?"

"Never;—nor yet wild."

"Oh, certainly not that. I 'm quite sure he 's never wild."

"When you say that, Kate, I know that you mean to abuse him."

"No; upon my word. What 's the good of abusing him to you? I like a man to be wild,—wild in my sense. You knew that before."

"I wonder whether you 'd like a wild man for yourself?"

"Ah! that 's a question I 've never asked myself. I 've been often curious to consider what sort of husband would suit you, but I 've had very few thoughts about a husband for myself. The truth is, I 'm married to George. Ever since——"

"Ever since what?"

"Since you and he were parted, I 've had nothing to do in life but to stick to him. And I shall do so to the end,—unless one thing should happen."

"And what 's that?"

"Unless you should become his wife after all. He will never marry anybody else."

"Kate, you should n't allude to such a thing now. You know that it 's impossible."

"Well; perhaps so. As far as I 'm concerned, it is all the better for me. If George ever married, I should have nothing to do in the world;—literally nothing—nothing—nothing—nothing!"

"Kate, don't talk in that way," and Alice came up to her and embraced her.

"Go away," said she. "Go, Alice; you and I must part. I cannot bear it any longer. You must know it all. When you are married to John Grey our friendship must be over. If you became George's wife I should become nobody. I 've nothing else in the world. You and he would be so all-sufficient for each other, that I should drop away from you like an old garment. But I 'd give up all, everything, every hope I have, to see you become George's wife. I know myself not to be very bad, and yet I care nothing for myself. Don't, Alice, don't; I don't want your caresses. Caress him, and I 'll kneel at your feet, and cover them with kisses." She had now thrown herself upon a sofa, and had turned her face away to the wall.

"Kate, you should n't speak in that way."

"Of course I should n't,—but I do."

"You, who know everything, must know that I cannot marry your brother,—even if he wished it."

"He does wish it."

"Not though I were under no other engagement."

"And why not?" said Kate, again starting up. "What is there to separate you from George now, but that unfortunate affair, that will end in the misery of you all? Do you think I can't see? Don't I know which of the two men you like best?"

"You are making me sorry, Kate, that I have ventured to come here in your brother's company. It is not only unkind of you to talk to me in this way, but worse than that—it is indelicate."

"Oh, indelicate! How I do hate that word. If any word in the language reminds me of a whited

sepulchre it is that;—all clean and polished outside, with filth and rottenness within. Are your thoughts delicate? that 's the thing. You are engaged to marry John Grey. That may be delicate enough if you love him truly, and feel yourself fitted to be his wife; but it 's about the most indelicate thing you can do, if you love any one better than him. Delicacy with many women is like their cleanliness. Nothing can be nicer than the whole outside get-up, but you would n't wish to answer for anything beneath."

"If you think ill of me like that——"

"No; I don't think ill of you. How can I think ill of you when I know that all your difficulties have come from him? It has n't been your fault; it has been his throughout. It is he who has driven you to sacrifice yourself on this altar. If we can, both of us, manage to lay aside all delicacy and pretence, and dare to speak the truth, we shall acknowledge that it is so. Had Mr. Grey come to you while things were smooth between you and George, would you have thought it possible that he could be George's rival in your estimation? It is Hyperion to a Satyr."

"And which is the Satyr?"

"I 'll leave your heart to tell you. You know what is the darling wish of my heart. But, Alice, if I thought that Mr. Grey was to you Hyperion,—if I thought that you could marry him with that sort of worshipping, idolatrous love which makes a girl proud as well as happy in her marriage, I would n't raise a little finger to prevent it."

To this Alice made no answer, and then Kate allowed the matter to drop. Alice made no answer,

though she felt that she was allowing judgment to go against her by default in not doing so. She had intended to fight bravely, and to have maintained the excellence of her present position as the affianced bride of Mr. Grey, but she felt that she had failed. She felt that she had, in some sort, acknowledged that the match was one to be deplored;—that her words in her own defence would by no means have satisfied Mr. Grey, if Mr. Grey could have heard them;—that they would have induced him to offer her back her troth rather than have made him happy as a lover. But she had nothing further to say. She could do something. She would hurry home and bid him name the earliest day he pleased. After that her cousin would cease to disturb her in her career.

It was nearly one o'clock before the two girls began to prepare for their morning start, and Alice, when they had finished their packing, seemed to be worn out with fatigue. "If you are tired, dear, we 'll put it off," said Kate. "Not for worlds," said Alice. "For half a word we 'll do it," continued Kate. "I 'll slip out to George and tell him, and there 's nothing he 'd like so much." But Alice would not consent.

About two they got into bed, and punctually at six they were at the railway station. "Don't speak to me," said George, when he met them at their door in the passage. "I shall only yawn in your face." However, they were in time,—which means abroad that they were at the station half an hour before their train started,—and they went on upon their journey to Strasbourg.

There is nothing further to be told of their tour.

They were but two days and nights on the road from Basle to London; and during those two days and nights neither George nor Kate spoke a word to Alice of her marriage, nor was any allusion made to the balcony at the inn, or to the bridge over the river.

CHAPTER VII.

AUNT GREENOW.

KATE VAVASOR remained only three days in London before she started for Yarmouth; and during those three days she was not much with her cousin. "I 'm my aunt's, body and soul, for the next six weeks," she said to Alice, when she did come to Queen Anne Street on the morning after her arrival. "And she is exigeant in a manner I can't at all explain to you. You must n't be surprised if I don't even write a line. I 've escaped by stealth now. She went upstairs to try on some new weeds for the seaside, and then I bolted." She did not say a word about George; nor during those three days, nor for some days afterwards, did George show himself. As it turned out afterwards, he had gone off to Scotland, and had remained a week among the grouse. Thus, at least, he had accounted for himself and his movements; but all George Vavasor's friends knew that his goings out and comings in were seldom accounted for openly like those of other men.

It will perhaps be as well to say a few words about Mrs. Greenow before we go with her to Yarmouth. Mrs. Greenow was the only daughter and the youngest child of the old squire at Vavasor Hall. She was just ten years younger than her brother John, and I am inclined to think that she was almost justified in

her repeated assertion that the difference was much greater than ten years, by the freshness of her colour, and by the general juvenility of her appearance. She certainly did not look forty, and who can expect a woman to proclaim herself to be older than her looks? In early life she had been taken from her father's house, and had lived with relatives in one of the large towns in the north of England. It is certain she had not been quite successful as a girl. Though she had enjoyed the name of being a beauty, she had not the usual success which comes from such repute. At thirty-four she was still unmarried. She had, moreover, acquired the character of being a flirt; and I fear that the stories which were told of her, though doubtless more than half false, had in them sufficient of truth to justify the character. Now this was very sad, seeing that Arabella Vavasor had no fortune, and that she had offended her father and brothers by declining to comply with their advice at certain periods of her career. There was, indeed, considerable trouble in the minds of the various male Vavasors with reference to Arabella, when tidings suddenly reached the Hall that she was going to be married to an old man.

She was married to the old man; and the marriage fortunately turned out satisfactorily, at any rate for the old man and for her family. The Vavasors were relieved from all further trouble, and were as much surprised as gratified when they heard that she did her duty well in her new position. Arabella had long been a thorn in their side, never having really done anything which they could pronounce to be absolutely wrong, but always giving them cause for fear. Now they feared no longer. Her husband was a retired

merchant, very rich, not very strong in health, and devoted to his bride. Rumours soon made their way to Vavasor Hall, and to Queen Anne Street, that Mrs. Greenow was quite a pattern wife, and that Mr. Greenow considered himself to be the happiest old man in Lancashire. And now in her prosperity she quite forgave the former slights which had been put upon her by her relatives. She wrote to her dear niece Alice, and to her dearest niece Kate, and sent little presents to her father. On one occasion she took her husband to Vavasor Hall, and there was a regular renewal of all the old family feelings. Arabella's husband was an old man, and was very old for his age; but the whole thing was quite respectable, and there was, at any rate, no doubt about the money. Then Mr. Greenow died; and the widow, having proved the will, came up to London and claimed the commiseration of her nieces.

"Why not go to Yarmouth with her for a month?" George had said to Kate. "Of course it will be a bore. But an aunt with forty thousand pounds has a right to claim attention." Kate acknowledged the truth of the argument, and agreed to go to Yarmouth for a month. "Your Aunt Arabella has shown herself to be a very sensible woman," the old squire had written; "much more sensible than anybody thought her before her marriage. Of course you should go with her if she asks you." What aunt, uncle, or cousin, in the uncontrolled possession of forty thousand pounds, was ever unpopular in the family?

Yarmouth is not a very prepossessing place to the eye. To my eye, at any rate, it is not so. There is an old town with which summer visitors have little or

nothing to do; and there are the new houses down by the sea-side, to which, at any rate, belongs the full advantage of sea air. A kind of esplanade runs for nearly a mile along the sands, and there are built, or in the course of building, rows of houses appropriated to summer visitors, all looking out upon the sea. There is no beauty unless the yellow sandy sea can be called beautiful. The coast is low and straight, and the east wind blows full upon it. But the place is healthy; and Mrs. Greenow was probably right in thinking that she might there revive some portion of the health which she had lost in watching beside the couch of her departing lord.

"Omnibus;—no, indeed. Jeannette, get me a fly." These were the first words Mrs. Greenow spoke as she put her foot upon the platform at the Yarmouth station. Her maid's name was Jenny; but Kate had already found, somewhat to her dismay, that orders had been issued before they left London that the girl was henceforth to be called Jeannette. Kate had also already found that her aunt could be imperious; but this taste for masterdom had not shown itself so plainly in London as it did from the moment that the train had left the station at Shoreditch. In London Mrs. Greenow had been among Londoners, and her career had hitherto been provincial. Her spirit, no doubt, had been somewhat cowed by the novelty of her position. But when she felt herself to be once beyond the stones, as the saying used to be, she was herself again; and at Ipswich she had ordered Jeannette to get her a glass of sherry with an air which had created a good deal of attention among the guards and porters.

The fly was procured; and with considerable exertion all Mrs. Greenow's boxes, together with the more moderate belongings of her niece and maid, were stowed on the top of it, round upon the driver's body on the coach box, on the maid's lap, and I fear in Kate's also, and upon the vacant seat.

"The large house in Montpelier Parade," said Mrs. Greenow.

"They is all large, ma'am," said the driver.

"The largest," said Mrs. Greenow.

"They 're much of a muchness," said the driver.

"Then Mrs. Jones's," said Mrs. Greenow. "But I was particularly told it was the largest in the row."

"I know Mrs. Jones's well," said the driver, and away they went.

Mrs. Jones's house was handsome and comfortable; but I fear Mrs. Greenow's satisfaction in this respect was impaired by her disappointment in finding that it was not perceptibly bigger than those to the right and left of her. Her ambition in this and in other similar matters would have amused Kate greatly had she been a bystander, and not one of her aunt's party. Mrs. Greenow was good-natured, liberal, and not by nature selfish; but she was determined not to waste the good things which fortune had given, and desired that all the world should see that she had forty thousand pounds of her own. And in doing this she was repressed by no feeling of false shame. She never hesitated in her demands through bashfulness. She called aloud for such comfort and grandeur as Yarmouth could afford her, and was well pleased that all around should hear her calling. Joined to all this was her uncontrolled grief for her husband's death.

"Dear Greenow! sweet lamb! Oh, Kate, if you 'd only known that man!" When she said this she was sitting in the best of Mrs. Jones's sitting-rooms, waiting to have dinner announced. She had taken a drawing-room and dining-room, "because," as she had said, "she did n't see why people should be stuffy when they went to the sea-side;—not if they had means to make themselves comfortable."

"Oh, Kate, I do wish you 'd known him!"

"I wish I had," said Kate,—very untruly. "I was unfortunately away when he went to Vavasor Hall."

"Ah, yes; but it was at home, in the domestic circle, that Greenow should have been seen to be appreciated. I was a happy woman, Kate, while that lasted." And Kate was surprised to see that real tears—one or two on each side—were making their way down her aunt's cheeks. But they were soon checked with a handkerchief of the broadest hem and of the finest cambric.

"Dinner, ma'am," said Jeannette, opening the door.

"Jeannette, I told you always to say that dinner was served."

"Dinner 's served then," said Jeannette in a tone of anger.

"Come, Kate," said her aunt. "I 've but little appetite myself, but there 's no reason you should n't eat your dinner. I specially wrote to Mrs. Jones to have some sweetbread. I do hope she 's got a decent cook. It 's very little I eat myself, but I do like to see things nice."

The next day was Sunday; and it was beautiful to see how Mrs. Greenow went to church in all the glory of widowhood. There had been a great unpacking after

that banquet on the sweetbread, and all her funereal millinery had been displayed before Kate's wondering eyes. The charm of the woman was in this,—that she was not in the least ashamed of anything that she did. She turned over all her wardrobe of mourning, showing the richness of each article, the stiffness of the crape, the fineness of the cambric, the breadth of the frills,—telling the price of each to a shilling, while she explained how the whole had been amassed without any consideration of expense. This she did with all the pride of a young bride when she shows the glories of her trousseau to the friend of her bosom. Jeannette stood by the while, removing one thing and exhibiting another. Now and again through the performance, Mrs. Greenow would rest awhile from her employment, and address the shade of the departed one in terms of most endearing affection. In the midst of this Mrs. Jones came in; but the widow was not a whit abashed by the presence of the stranger. "Peace be to his manes!" she said at last, as she carefully folded up a huge black crape mantilla. She made, however, but one syllable of the classical word, and Mrs. Jones thought that her lodger had addressed herself to the mortal "remains" of her deceased lord.

"He has left her uncommon well off, I suppose," said Mrs. Jones to Jeannette.

"You may say that, ma'am. It 's more nor a hundred thousand of pounds!"

"No!"

"Pounds of sterling, ma'am! Indeed it is;—to my knowledge."

"Why don't she have a carriage?"

"So she do;—but a lady can't bring her carriage

down to the sea when she 's only just buried her husband, as one may say. What 'd folks say if they saw her in her own carriage? But it ain't because she can't afford it, Mrs. Jones. And now we 're talking of it you must order a fly for church to-morrow, that 'll look private, you know. She said I was to get a man that had a livery coat and gloves."

The man with the coat and gloves was procured; and Mrs. Greenow's entry into church made quite a sensation. There was a thoughtfulness about her which alone showed that she was a woman of no ordinary power. She foresaw all necessities, and made provision for all emergencies. Another would not have secured an eligible sitting, and been at home in Yarmouth church, till half the period of her sojourn there was over. But Mrs. Greenow had done it all. She walked up the middle aisle with as much self-possession as though the chancel had belonged to her family for years; and the respectable pew-opener absolutely deserted two or three old ladies whom she was attending, to show Mrs. Greenow into her seat. When seated, she was the cynosure of all eyes. Kate Vavasor became immediately aware that a great sensation had been occasioned by their entrance, and equally aware that none of it was due to her. I regret to say that this feeling continued to show itself throughout the whole service. How many ladies of forty go to church without attracting the least attention! But it is hardly too much to say that every person in that church had looked at Mrs. Greenow. I doubt if there was present there a single married lady who, on leaving the building, did not speak to her husband of the widow. There had prevailed during the whole

two hours a general though unexpressed conviction that something worthy of remark had happened that morning. It had an effect even upon the curate's reading; and the incumbent, while preaching his sermon, could not keep his eyes off that wonderful bonnet and veil.

On the next morning, before eleven, Mrs. Greenow's name was put down at the Assembly Room. "I need hardly say that in my present condition I care nothing for these things. Of course I would sooner be alone. But, my dear Kate, I know what I owe to you."

Kate, with less intelligence than might have been expected from one so clever, began to assure her aunt that she required no society; and that, coming thus with her to the sea-side in the early days of her widowhood, she had been well aware that they would live retired. But Mrs. Greenow soon put her down, and did so without the slightest feeling of shame or annoyance on her own part. "My dear," she said, "in this matter you must let me do what I know to be right. I should consider myself to be very selfish if I allowed my grief to interfere with your amusements."

"But, aunt, I don't care for such amusements."

"That 's nonsense, my dear. You ought to care for them. How are you to settle yourself in life if you don't care for them?"

"My dear aunt, I am settled."

"Settled!" said Mrs. Greenow, astounded, as though there must have been some hidden marriage of which she had not heard. "But that 's nonsense. Of course you 're not settled; and how are you to be, if I allow you to shut yourself up in such a place as this,—just where a girl has a chance?"

It was in vain that Kate tried to stop her. It was not easy to stop Mrs. Greenow when she was supported by the full assurance of being mistress of the place and of the occasion. "No, my dear; I know very well what I owe to you, and I shall do my duty. As I said before, society can have no charms now for such a one as I am. All that social intercourse could ever do for me lies buried in my darling's grave. My heart is desolate, and must remain so. But I 'm not going to immolate you on the altars of my grief. I shall force myself to go out for your sake, Kate."

"But, dear aunt, the world will think it so odd, just at present."

"I don't care twopence for the world. What can the world do to me? I 'm not dependent on the world,—thanks to the care of that sainted lamb. I can hold my own; and as long as I can do that the world won't hurt me. No, Kate, if I think a thing 's right I shall do it. I mean to make the place pleasant to you if I can, and the world may object if it likes."

Mrs. Greenow was probably right in her appreciation of the value of her independence. Remarks may perhaps have been made by the world of Yarmouth as to her early return to society. People, no doubt, did remind each other that old Greenow was hardly yet four months buried. Mrs. Jones and Jeannette probably had their little jokes downstairs. But this did not hurt Mrs. Greenow. What was said was not said in her hearing. Mrs. Jones's bills were paid every Saturday with admirable punctuality; and as long as this was done everybody about the house treated the lady with that deference which was due to the respectability of her possessions. When a recently bereaved

widow attempts to enjoy her freedom without money, then it behoves the world to speak aloud;—and the world does its duty.

Numerous people came to call at Montpelier Parade, and Kate was astonished to find that her aunt had so many friends. She was indeed so bewildered by these strangers that she could hardly ascertain whom her aunt had really known before, and whom she now saw for the first time. Somebody had known somebody who had known somebody else, and that was allowed to be a sufficient introduction,—always presuming that the existing somebody was backed by some known advantages of money or position. Mrs. Greenow could smile from beneath her widow's cap in a most bewitching way. "Upon my word then she is really handsome," Kate wrote one day to Alice. But she could also frown, and knew well how to put aside, or, if need be, to reprobate any attempt at familiarity from those whose worldly circumstances were supposed to be disadvantageous.

"My dear aunt," said Kate one morning after their walk upon the pier, "how you did snub that Captain Bellfield!"

"Captain Bellfield, indeed! I don't believe he 's a captain at all. At any rate he has sold out, and the tradesmen have had a scramble for the money. He was only a lieutenant when the 97th were in Manchester, and I 'm sure he 's never had a shilling to purchase since that."

"But everybody here seems to know him."

"Perhaps they do not know so much of him as I do. The idea of his having the impudence to tell me I was looking very well! Nothing can be so mean

as men who go about in that way when they have n't money enough in their pockets to pay their washerwoman."

"But how do you know, aunt, that Captain Bellfield has n't paid his washerwoman?"

"I know more than you think, my dear. It 's my business. How could I tell whose attentions you should receive and whose you should n't, if I did n't inquire into these things?"

It was in vain that Kate rebelled, or attempted to rebel against this more than maternal care. She told her aunt that she was now nearly thirty, and that she had managed her own affairs, at any rate with safety, for the last ten years;—but it was to no purpose. Kate would get angry; but Mrs. Greenow never became angry. Kate would be quite in earnest; but Mrs. Greenow would push aside all that her niece said as though it were worth nothing. Kate was an unmarried woman with a very small fortune, and therefore, of course, was desirous of being married with as little delay as possible. It was natural that she should deny that it was so, especially at this early date in their mutual acquaintance. When the niece came to know her aunt more intimately, there might be confidence between them, and then they would do better. But Mrs. Greenow would spare neither herself nor her purse on Kate's behalf, and she would be a dragon of watchfulness in protecting her from the evil desires of such useless men as Captain Bellfield.

"I declare, Kate, I don't understand you," she said one morning to her niece as they sat together over a late breakfast. They had fallen into luxurious habits, and I am afraid it was past eleven o'clock, although

the breakfast things were still on the table. Kate would usually bathe before breakfast, but Mrs. Greenow was never out of her room till half-past ten. "I like the morning for contemplation," she once said. "When a woman has gone through all that I have suffered she has a great deal to think of." "And it is so much more comfortable to be a-thinking when one 's in bed," said Jeannette, who was present at the time. "Child, hold your tongue," said the widow. "Yes, ma'am," said Jeannette. But we will return to the scene at the breakfast-table.

"What don't you understand, aunt?"

"You only danced twice last night, and once you stood up with Captain Bellfield."

"On purpose to ask after that poor woman who washes his clothes without getting paid for it."

"Nonsense, Kate; you did n't ask him anything of the kind, I 'm sure. It 's very provoking. It is indeed."

"But what harm can Captain Bellfield do me?"

"What good can he do you? That 's the question. You see, my dear, years will go by. I don't mean to say you ain't quite as young as ever you were, and nothing can be nicer and fresher than you are;—especially since you took to bathing."

"Oh, aunt, don't!"

"My dear, the truth must be spoken. I declare I don't think I ever saw a young woman so improvident as you are. When are you to begin to think about getting married if you don't do it now?"

"I shall never begin to think about it till I buy my wedding clothes."

"That 's nonsense,—sheer nonsense. How are you

to get wedding clothes if you have never thought about getting a husband? Did n't I see Mr. Cheesacre ask you to dance last night?"

"Yes, he did; while you were talking to Captain Bellfield yourself, aunt."

"Captain Bellfield can't hurt me, my dear. And why did n't you dance with Mr. Cheesacre?"

"He 's a fat Norfolk farmer, with not an idea beyond the virtues of stall-feeding."

"My dear, every acre of it is his own land,—every acre! And he bought another farm for thirteen thousand pounds only last autumn. They 're better than the squires,—some of those gentlemen farmers; they are indeed. And of all men in the world they 're the easiest managed."

"That 's a recommendation, no doubt."

"Of course it is;—a great recommendation." Mrs. Greenow had no idea of joking when her mind was intent on serious things. "He 's to take us to the picnic to-morrow, and I do hope you 'll manage to let him sit beside you. It 'll be the place of honour, because he gives all the wine. He 's picked up with that man Bellfield, and he 's to be there; but if you allow your name to be once mixed up with his, it will be all over with you as far as Yarmouth is concerned."

"I don't at all want to be mixed up with Captain Bellfield, as you call it," said Kate. Then she subsided into her novel, while Mrs. Greenow busied herself about the good things for the picnic. In truth, the aunt did not understand the niece. Whatsoever might be the faults of Kate Vavasor, an unmaidenly desire of catching a husband for herself was certainly not one of them.

CHAPTER VIII.

MR. CHEESACRE.

YARMOUTH is not a happy place for a picnic. A picnic should be held among green things. Green turf is absolutely an essential. There should be trees, broken ground, small paths, thickets, and hidden recesses. There should, if possible, be rocks, old timber, moss, and brambles. There should certainly be hills and dales,—on a small scale, and, above all, there should be running water. There should be no expanse. Jones should not be able to see all Greene's movements, nor should Augusta always have her eye upon her sister Jane. But the spot chosen for Mr. Cheesacre's picnic at Yarmouth had none of the virtues above described. It was on the sea-shore. Nothing was visible from the site but sand and sea. There were no trees there and nothing green;—neither was there any running water. But there was a long, dry, flat strand; there was an old boat half turned over, under which it was proposed to dine; and in addition to this, benches, boards, and some amount of canvas for shelter were provided by the liberality of Mr. Cheesacre. Therefore it was called Mr. Cheesacre's picnic.

But it was to be a marine picnic, and therefore the essential attributes of other picnics were not required. The idea had come from some boating expeditions, in which mackerel had been caught, and during which

food had been eaten, not altogether comfortably, in the boats. Then a thought had suggested itself to Captain Bellfield that they might land and eat their food, and his friend Mr. Cheesacre had promised his substantial aid. A lady had surmised that Ormesby sands would be the very place for dancing in the cool of the evening. They might "dance on the sand," she said, "and yet no footing seen." And so the thing had progressed, and the picnic been inaugurated.

It was Mr. Cheesacre's picnic undoubtedly. Mr. Cheesacre was to supply the boats, the wine, the cigars, the music, and the carpenter's work necessary for the turning of the old boat into a banqueting saloon. But Mrs. Greenow had promised to provide the eatables, and enjoyed as much of the éclat as the master of the festival. She had known Mr. Cheesacre now for ten days, and was quite intimate with him. He was a stout, florid man, of about forty-five, a bachelor, apparently much attached to ladies' society, bearing no sign of age except that he was rather bald, and that grey hairs had mixed themselves with his whiskers, very fond of his farming, and yet somewhat ashamed of it when he found himself in what he considered to be polite circles. And he was, moreover, a little inclined to seek the honour which comes from a well-filled and liberally opened purse. He liked to give a man a dinner and then to boast of the dinner he had given. He was very proud when he could talk of having mounted, for a day's hunting, any man who might be supposed to be of higher rank than himself. "I had Grimsby with me the other day,—the son of old Grimsby of Hatherwick, you know. Blessed if he did n't stake my bay mare. But what matters? I

mounted him again the next day just the same." Some people thought he was soft, for it was very well known throughout Norfolk that young Grimsby would take a mount wherever he could get it. In these days Mrs. Greenow had become intimate with Mr. Cheesacre, and had already learned that he was the undoubted owner of his own acres.

"It would n't do for me," she had said to him, "to be putting myself forward, as if I were giving a party myself, or anything of that sort;—would it now?"

"Well, perhaps not. But you might come with us."

"So I will, Mr. Cheesacre, for that dear girl's sake. I should never forgive myself if I debarred her from all the pleasures of youth because of my sorrows. I need hardly say that at such a time as this nothing of that sort can give me any pleasure."

"I suppose not," said Mr. Cheesacre, with a solemn look.

"Quite out of the question." And Mrs. Greenow wiped away her tears. "For though as regards age I might dance on the sands as merrily as the best of them——"

"That I 'm sure you could, Mrs. Greenow."

"How 's a woman to enjoy herself if her heart lies buried?"

"But it won't be so always, Mrs. Greenow."

Mrs. Greenow shook her head to show that she hardly knew how to answer such a question. Probably it would be so always;—but she did not wish to put a damper on the present occasion by making so sad a declaration. "But as I was saying," continued she—"if you and I do it between us won't that be the surest way of having it come off nicely?"

Mr. Cheesacre thought that it would be the best way.

"Exactly so;—I 'll do the meat and pastry and fruit, and you shall do the boats and the wine."

"And the music," said Cheesacre, "and the expenses at the place." He did not choose that any part of his outlay should go unnoticed.

"I 'll go halves in all that if you like," said Mrs. Greenow. But Mr. Cheesacre had declined this. He did not begrudge the expense, but only wished that it should be recognised.

"And, Mr. Cheesacre," continued Mrs. Greenow, "I did mean to send the music, I did, indeed."

"I could n't hear of it, Mrs. Greenow."

"But I mention it now, because I was thinking of getting Blowehard to come. That other man, Flutey, would n't do at all out in the open air."

"It shall be Blowehard," said Mr. Cheesacre; and it was Blowehard. Mrs. Greenow liked to have her own way in these little things, though her heart did lie buried.

On the morning of the picnic Mr. Cheesacre came down to Montpelier Parade with Captain Bellfield, whose linen on that occasion certainly gave no outward sign of any quarrel between him and his washerwoman. He was got up wonderfully, and was prepared at all points for the day's work. He had on a pseudo-sailor's jacket, very liberally ornamented with brass buttons, which displayed with great judgment the exquisite shape of his pseudo-sailor's duck trousers. Beneath them there was a pair of very shiny patent-leather shoes, well adapted for dancing on the sand, presuming him to be anxious of doing so, as Venus offered to do, without leaving any foot-

marks. His waistcoat was of a delicate white fabric, ornamented with very many gilt buttons. He had bejewelled studs in his shirt, and yellow kid gloves on his hands; having, of course, another pair in his pocket for the necessities of the evening. His array was quite perfect, and had stricken dismay into the heart of his friend Cheesacre, when he joined that gentleman. He was a well-made man, nearly six feet high, with dark hair, dark whiskers, and dark moustache, nearly black, but of that suspicious hue which to the observant beholder seems always to tell a tale of the hairdresser's shop. He was handsome, too, with well-arranged features,—but carrying, perhaps, in his nose some first symptoms of the effects of midnight amusements. Upon the whole, however, he was a nice man to look on,—for those who liked to look on nice men of that kind.

Cheesacre, too, had adopted something of a sailor's garb. He had on a jacket of a rougher sort, coming down much lower than that of the captain, being much looser, and perhaps somewhat more like a garment which a possible seaman might possibly wear. But he was disgusted with himself the moment that he saw Bellfield. His heart had been faint, and he had not dared to ornament himself boldly as his friend had done. "I say, Guss, you are a swell," he exclaimed. It may be explained that Captain Bellfield had been christened Gustavus.

"I don't know much about that," said the captain; "my fellow sent me this toggery, and said that it was the sort of thing. I 'll change with you if you like it." But Cheesacre could not have worn that jacket, and he walked on, hating himself.

It will be remembered that Mrs. Greenow had spoken with considerable severity of Captain Bellfield's pretensions when discussing his character with her niece; but, nevertheless, on the present occasion she received him with most gracious smiles. It may be that her estimate of his character had been altered, or that she was making sacrifice of her own feelings in consideration of Mr. Cheesacre, who was known to be the captain's intimate friend. But she had smiles for both of them. She had a wondrous power of smiling; and could, upon occasion, give signs of peculiar favour to half-a-dozen different gentlemen in as many minutes. They found her in the midst of hampers which were not yet wholly packed, while Mrs. Jones, Jeannette, and the cook of the household moved around her, on the outside of the circle, ministering to her wants. She had in her hand an outspread clean napkin, and she wore fastened round her dress a huge coarse apron, that she might thus be protected from some possible ebullition of gravy, or escape of salad mixture, or cream; but in other respects she was clothed in the fullest honours of widowhood. She had not mitigated her weeds by half an inch. She had scorned to make any compromise between the world of pleasure and the world of woe. There she was, a widow, declared by herself to be of four months' standing, with a buried heart, making ready a dainty banquet with skill and liberality. She was ready on the instant to sit down upon the basket in which the grouse pie had been just carefully inhumed, and talk about her sainted lamb with a deluge of tears. If anybody did n't like it, that person—might do the

other thing. Mr. Cheesacre and Captain Bellfield thought that they did like it.

"Oh, Mr. Cheesacre, if you have n't caught me before I 've half done! Captain Bellfield, I hope you think my apron becoming."

"Everything that you wear, Mrs. Greenow, is always becoming."

"Don't talk in that way when you know——; but never mind—we will think of nothing sad to-day if we can help it. Will we, Mr. Cheesacre?"

"Oh dear, no; I should think not;—unless it should come on to rain."

"It won't rain—we won't think of such a thing. But, by-the-bye, Captain Bellfield, I and my niece do mean to send out a few things, just in a bag, you know, so that we may tidy ourselves up a little after the sea. I don't want it mentioned, because if it gets about among the other ladies, they 'd think we wanted to make a dressing of it;—and there would n't be room for them all; would there?"

"No; there would n't," said Mr. Cheesacre, who had been out on the previous evening, inspecting, and perhaps limiting, the carpenters in their work.

"That 's just it," said Mrs. Greenow. "But there won't be any harm, will there, Mr. Cheesacre, in Jeannette going out with our things? She 'll ride in the cart, you know, with the eatables. I know Jeannette's a friend of yours."

"We shall be delighted to have Jeannette," said Mr. Cheesacre.

"Thank ye, sir," said Jeannette, with a curtsey.

"Jeannette, don't you let Mr. Cheesacre turn your

head; and mind you behave yourself and be useful. Well; let me see;—what else is there? Mrs. Jones, you might as well give me that ham now. Captain Bellfield, hand it over. Don't you put it into the basket, because you 'd turn it the wrong side down. There now, if you have n't nearly made me upset the apricot pie." Then, in the transfer of the dishes between the captain and the widow, there occurred some little innocent by-play, which seemed to give offence to Mr. Cheesacre; so that gentleman turned his back upon the hampers and took a step away towards the door.

Mrs. Greenow saw the thing at a glance, and immediately applied herself to cure the wound. "What do you think, Mr. Cheesacre?" said she. "Kate would n't come down because she did n't choose that you should see her with an apron on over her frock!"

"I 'm sure I don't know why Miss Vavasor should care about my seeing her."

"Nor I neither. That 's just what I said. Do step up into the drawing-room; you 'll find her there, and you can make her answer for herself."

"She would n't come down for me," said Mr. Cheesacre. But he did n't stir. Perhaps he was n't willing to leave his friend with the widow.

At length the last of the dishes was packed, and Mrs. Greenow went upstairs with the two gentlemen. There they found Kate and two or three other ladies who had promised to embark under the protection of Mrs. Greenow's wings. There were the two Miss Fairstairs, whom Mrs. Greenow had especially patronised, and who repaid that lady for her kindness by an amount of outspoken eulogy which startled Kate by its audacity.

"Your dear aunt!" Fanny Fairstairs had said on coming into the room. "I don't think I ever came across a woman with such genuine milk of human kindness!"

"Nor with so much true wit," said her sister Charlotte,—who had been called Charlie on the sands of Yarmouth for the last twelve years.

When the widow came into the room, they flew at her and devoured her with kisses, and swore that they had never seen her looking so well. But as the bright new gloves which both the girls wore had been presents from Mrs. Greenow, they certainly did owe her some affection. There are not many ladies who would venture to bestow such gifts upon their friends after so very short an acquaintance; but Mrs. Greenow had a power that was quite her own in such matters. She was already on a very confidential footing with the Miss Fairstairs, and had given them much useful advice as to their future prospects.

And then there was a Mrs. Green, whose husband was first-lieutenant on board a man-of-war on the West Indian station. Mrs. Green was a quiet, ladylike little woman, rather pretty, very silent, and, as one would have thought, hardly adapted for the special intimacy of Mrs. Greenow. But Mrs. Greenow had found out that she was alone, not very rich, and in want of the solace of society. Therefore she had, from sheer good-nature, forced herself upon Mrs. Green, and Mrs. Green, with much trepidation, had consented to be taken to the picnic. "I know your husband would like it," Mrs. Greenow had said, "and I hope I may live to tell him that I made you go."

There came in also a brother of the Fairstairs girls,

Joe Fairstairs, a lanky, useless, idle young man, younger than them, who was supposed to earn his bread in an attorney's office at Norwich, or rather to be preparing to earn it at some future time, and who was a heavy burden upon all his friends. "We told Joe to come to the house," said Fanny to the widow, apologetically, "because we thought he might be useful in carrying down the cloaks." Mrs. Greenow smiled graciously upon Joe, and assured him that she was charmed to see him, without any reference to such services as those mentioned.

And then they started. When they got to the door both Cheesacre and the captain made an attempt to get possession of the widow's arm. But she had it all arranged. Captain Bellfield found himself constrained to attend to Mrs. Green, while Mr. Cheesacre walked down to the beach beside Kate Vavasor. "I 'll take your arm, Mr. Joe," said the widow, "and the girls shall come with us." But when they got to the boats, round which the other comers to the picnic were already assembled, Mr. Cheesacre,—although both the boats were for the day his own,—found himself separated from the widow. He got into that which contained Kate Vavasor, and was shoved off from the beach while he saw Captain Bellfield arranging Mrs. Greenow's drapery. He had declared to himself that it should be otherwise; and that as he had to pay the piper, the piper should play as he liked it. But Mrs. Greenow with a word or two had settled it all, and Mr. Cheesacre had found himself to be powerless. "How absurd Bellfield looks in that jacket, does n't he?" he said to Kate, as he took his seat in the boat.

"Do you think so? I thought it was so very pretty and becoming for the occasion."

Mr. Cheesacre hated Captain Bellfield, and regretted more than ever that he had not done something for his own personal adornment. He could not endure to think that his friend, who paid for nothing, should carry away the honours of the morning and defraud him of the delights which should justly belong to him. "It may be becoming," said Cheesacre; "but don't you think it 's awfully extravagant?"

"As to that I can't tell. You see I don't at all know what is the price of a jacket covered all over with little brass buttons."

"And the waistcoat, Miss Vavasor!" said Cheesacre, almost solemnly.

"The waistcoat I should think must have been expensive."

"Oh, dreadful! and he 's got nothing, Miss Vavasor; literally nothing. Do you know,"—and he reduced his voice to a whisper as he made this communication,—"I lent him twenty pounds the day before yesterday; I did indeed. You won't mention it again, of course. I tell you, because, as you are seeing a good deal of him just now, I think it right that you should know on what sort of a footing he stands." It 's all fair, they say, in love and war, and this small breach of confidence was, we must presume, a love stratagem on the part of Mr. Cheesacre. He was at this time smitten with the charms both of the widow and of the niece, and he constantly found that the captain was interfering with him on whichever side he turned himself. On the present occasion he had desired to take the widow for his share, and was, upon

the whole, inclined to think that the widow was the more worthy of his attentions. He had made certain little inquiries within the last day or two, the answers to which had been satisfactory. These he had by no means communicated to his friend, to whom, indeed, he had expressed an opinion that Mrs. Greenow was after all only a flash in the pan. "She does very well pour passer le temps," the captain had answered. Mr. Cheesacre had not quite understood the exact gist of the captain's meaning, but had felt certain that his friend was playing him false.

"I don't want it to be mentioned again, Miss Vavasor," he continued.

"Such things should not be mentioned at all," Kate replied, having been angered at the insinuation that the nature of Captain Bellfield's footing could be a matter of any moment to her.

"No, they should n't; and therefore I know that I 'm quite safe with you, Miss Vavasor. He 's a very pleasant fellow, very; and has seen the world,—uncommon; but he 's better for eating and drinking with than he is for buying and selling with, as we say in Norfolk. Do you like Norfolk, Miss Vavasor?"

"I never was in it before, and now I 've only seen Yarmouth."

"A nice place, Yarmouth, very; but you should come up and see our lands. I suppose you don't know that we feed one-third of England during the winter months."

"Dear me!"

"We do, though; nobody knows what a county Norfolk is. Taking it altogether, including the game, you know, and Lord Nelson, and its watering-places,

and the rest of it, I don't think there 's a county in England to beat it. Fancy feeding one-third of all England and Wales!"

"With bread and cheese, do you mean, and those sort of things?"

"Beef!" said Mr. Cheesacre, and in his patriotic energy he repeated the word aloud. "Beef! Yes indeed; but if you were to tell them that in London they would n't believe you. Ah! you should certainly come down and see our lands. The 7.45 A.M. train would take you through Norwich to my door, as one may say, and you would be back by the 6.22 P.M." In this way he brought himself back again into good-humour, feeling, that in the absence of the widow, he could not do better than make progress with the niece.

In the meantime Mrs. Greenow and the captain were getting on very comfortably in the other boat. "Take an oar, captain," one of the men had said to him as soon as he had placed the ladies. "Not to-day, Jack," he had answered. "I 'll content myself with being bo'san this morning." "The best thing as the bo'san does is to pipe all hands to grog," said the man. "I won't be behind in that either," said the captain; and so they all went on swimmingly.

"What a fine generous fellow your friend, Mr. Cheesacre, is!" said the widow.

"Yes, he is; he 's a capital fellow in his way. Some of these Norfolk farmers are no end of good fellows."

"And I suppose he 's something more than a common farmer. He 's visited by the people about where he lives, is n't he?"

"Oh yes, in a sort of a way. The county people, you know, keep themselves very much to themselves."

"That 's of course. But his house;—he has a good sort of place, has n't he?"

"Yes, yes;—a very good house;—a little too near to the horsepond for my taste. But when a man gets his money out of the till, he must n't be ashamed of the counter;—must he, Mrs. Greenow?"

"But he could live like a gentleman if he let his own land, could n't he?"

"That depends upon how a gentleman wishes to live." Here the privacy of their conversation was interrupted by an exclamation from a young lady to the effect that Charlie Fairstairs was becoming sick. This Charlie stoutly denied, and proved the truth of her assertion by her behaviour. Soon after this they completed their marine adventures, and prepared to land close to the spot at which the banquet was prepared.

CHAPTER IX.

THE RIVALS.

THERE had been a pretence of fishing, but no fish had been caught. It was soon found that such an amusement would interfere with the ladies' dresses, and the affair had become too serious to allow of any trivial interruption. "I really think, Mr. Cheesacre," an anxious mother had said, "that you 'd better give it up. The water off the nasty cord has got all over Maria's dress, already." Maria made a faint protest that it did not signify in the least; but the fishing was given up,—not without an inward feeling on the part of Mr. Cheesacre that if Maria chose to come out with him in his boat, having been invited especially to fish, she ought to have put up with the natural results. "There are people who like to take everything and never like to give anything," he said to Kate afterwards, as he was walking up with her to the picnic dinner. But he was unreasonable and unjust. The girls had graced his party with their best hats and freshest muslins, not that they might see him catch a mackerel, but that they might flirt and dance to the best advantage. "You can't suppose that any girl will like to be drenched with sea-water when she has taken so much trouble with her starch," said Kate. "Then she should n't come fishing," said Mr. Cheesacre. "I hate such airs."

But when they arrived at the old boat, Mrs. Green-

ow shone forth pre-eminently as the mistress of the occasion, altogether overshadowing Mr. Cheesacre by the extent of her authority. There was a little contest for supremacy between them, invisible to the eyes of the multitude; but Mr. Cheesacre in such a matter had not a chance against Mrs. Greenow. I am disposed to think that she would have reigned even though she had not contributed the eatables; but with that point in her favour, she was able to make herself supreme. Jeannette, too, was her servant, which was a great thing. Mr. Cheesacre soon gave way; and though he bustled about and was conspicuous, he bustled about in obedience to orders received, and became a head servant. Captain Bellfield also made himself useful, but he drove Mr. Cheesacre into paroxyms of suppressed anger by giving directions, and by having those directions obeyed. A man to whom he had lent twenty pounds the day before yesterday, and who had not contributed so much as a bottle of champagne!

"We 're to dine at four, and now it 's half-past three," said Mrs. Greenow, addressing herself to the multitude.

"And to begin to dance at six," said an eager young lady.

"Maria, hold your tongue," said the young lady's mother.

"Yes, we 'll dine at four," said Mr. Cheesacre. "And as for the music, I 've ordered it to be here punctual at half-past five. We 're to have three horns, cymbals, triangle, and a drum."

"How very nice; is n't it, Mrs. Greenow?" said Charlie Fairstairs.

"And now suppose we begin to unpack," said Captain Bellfield. "Half the fun is in arranging the things."

"Oh dear, yes; more than half," said Fanny Fairstairs.

"Bellfield, don't mind about the hampers," said Cheesacre. "Wine is a ticklish thing to handle, and there 's my man there to manage it."

"It 's odd if I don't know more about wine than the boots from the hotel," said Bellfield. This allusion to the boots almost cowed Mr. Cheesacre, and made him turn away, leaving Bellfield with the widow.

There was a great unpacking, during which Captain Bellfield and Mrs. Greenow constantly had their hands in the same hamper. I by no means intend to insinuate that there was anything wrong in this. People engaged together in unpacking pies and cold chickens must have their hands in the same hamper. But a great intimacy was thereby produced, and the widow seemed to have laid aside altogether that prejudice of hers with reference to the washerwoman. There was a long table placed on the sand, sheltered by the upturned boat from the land side, but open towards the sea, and over this, supported on poles, there was an awning. Upon the whole the arrangement was not an uncomfortable one for people who had selected so very uncomfortable a dining-room as the sand of the sea-shore. Much was certainly due to Mr. Cheesacre for the expenditure he had incurred,—and something perhaps to Captain Bellfield for his ingenuity in having suggested it.

Now came the placing of the guests for dinner, and

Mr. Cheesacre made another great effort. "I 'll tell you what," said he, aloud, "Bellfield and I will take the two ends of the table, and Mrs. Greenow shall sit at my right hand." This was not only boldly done, but there was a propriety in it which at first sight seemed to be irresistible. Much as he had hated and did hate the captain, he had skilfully made the proposition in such a way as to flatter him, and it seemed for a few moments as though he were going to have it all his own way. But Captain Bellfield was not a man to submit to defeat in such a matter as this without an effort. "I don't think that will do," said he. "Mrs. Greenow gives the dinner, and Cheesacre gives the wine. We must have them at the two ends of the table. I am sure Mrs. Greenow won't refuse to allow me to hand her to the place which belongs to her. I will sit at her right hand and be her minister." Mrs. Greenow did not refuse,—and so the matter was adjusted.

Mr. Cheesacre took his seat in despair. It was nothing to him that he had Kate Vavasor at his left hand. He liked talking to Kate very well, but he could not enjoy that pleasure while Captain Bellfield was in the very act of making progress with the widow. "One would think that he had given it himself; would n't you?" he said to Maria's mother, who sat at his right hand.

The lady did not in the least understand him. "Given what?" said she.

"Why, the music and the wine and all the rest of it. There are some people full of that kind of impudence. How they manage to carry it on without ever paying a shilling, I never could tell. I know I have

to pay my way, and something over and beyond generally."

Maria's mother said, "Yes, indeed." She had other daughters there besides Maria, and was looking down the table to see whether they were judiciously placed. Her beauty, her youngest one, Ophelia, was sitting next to that ne'er-do-well Joe Fairstairs, and this made her unhappy. "Ophelia, my dear, you are dreadfully in the draught; there 's a seat up here, just opposite, where you 'll be more comfortable."

"There 's no draught here, mamma," said Ophelia, without the slightest sign of moving. Perhaps Ophelia liked the society of that lanky, idle, useless young man.

The mirth of the table certainly came from Mrs. Greenow's end. The widow had hardly taken her place before she got up again and changed with the captain. It was found that the captain could better carve the great grouse pie from the end than from the side. Cheesacre, when he saw this, absolutely threw down his knife and fork violently upon the table. "Is anything the matter?" said Maria's mother.

"Matter!" said he. Then he shook his head in grief of heart and vexation of spirit, and resumed his knife and fork. Kate watched it all, and was greatly amused. "I never saw a man so nearly broken-hearted," she said, in her letter to Alice the next day. "Eleven, thirteen, eighteen, twenty-one," said Cheesacre to himself, reckoning up in his misery the number of pounds sterling which he would have to pay for being ill-treated in this way.

"Ladies and gentlemen," said Captain Bellfield, as soon as the eating was over, "if I may be permitted

to get upon my legs for two minutes, I am going to propose a toast to you." The real patron of the feast had actually not yet swallowed his last bit of cheese. The thing was indecent in the violence of its injustice.

"If you please, Captain Bellfield," said the patron, indifferent to the cheese in his throat, "I 'll propose the toast."

"Nothing on earth could be better, my dear fellow," said the captain, "and I 'm sure I should be the last man in the world to take the job out of the hands of one who would do it so much better than I can; but as it 's your health that we 're going to drink, I really don't see how you are to do it."

Cheesacre grunted and sat down. He certainly could not propose his own health, nor did he complain of the honour that was to be done him. It was very proper that his health should be drunk, and he had now to think of the words in which he would return thanks. But the extent of his horror may be imagined when Bellfield got up and made a most brilliant speech in praise of Mrs. Greenow. For full five minutes he went on without mentioning the name of Cheesacre. Yarmouth, he said, had never in his days been so blessed as it had been this year by the presence of the lady who was now with them. She had come among them, he declared, forgetful of herself and of her great sorrows, with the sole desire of adding something to the happiness of others. Then Mrs. Greenow had taken out her pocket-handkerchief, sweeping back the broad ribbons of her cap over her shoulders. Altogether the scene was very affecting, and Cheesacre was driven to madness. They were the very words that he had intended to speak himself.

"I hate all this kind of thing," he said to Kate. "It 's so fulsome."

"After-dinner speeches never mean anything," said Kate.

At last, when Bellfield had come to an end of praising Mrs. Greenow, he told the guests that he wished to join his friend Cheesacre in the toast, the more so as it could hardly be hoped that Mrs. Greenow would herself rise to return thanks. There was no better fellow than his friend Cheesacre, whom he had known for he would not say how many years. He was quite sure they would all have the most sincere pleasure in joining the health of Mr. Cheesacre with that of Mrs. Greenow. Then there was a clattering of glasses and a murmuring of healths, and Mr. Cheesacre slowly got upon his legs.

"I 'm very much obliged to this company," said he, "and to my friend Bellfield, who really is,—but perhaps that does n't signify now. I 've had the greatest pleasure in getting up this little thing, and I 'd made up my mind to propose Mrs. Greenow's health; but, h'm, ha, no doubt it has been in better hands. Perhaps, considering all things, Bellfield might have waited."

"With such a subject on my hands, I could n't wait a moment."

"I did n't interrupt you, Captain Bellfield, and perhaps you 'll let me go on without interrupting me. We 've all drunk Mrs. Greenow's health, and I 'm sure she 's very much obliged. So am I for the honour you 've done me. I have taken some trouble in getting up this little thing, and I hope you like it. I think somebody said something about liberality. I

beg to assure you that I don't think of that for a moment. Somebody must pay for these sort of things, and I 'm always very glad to take my turn. I dare say Bellfield will give us the next picnic, and if he 'll appoint a day before the end of the month, I shall be happy to be one of the party." Then he sat down with some inward satisfaction, fully convinced that he had given his enemy a fatal blow.

"Nothing on earth would give me so much pleasure," said Bellfield. After that he turned again to Mrs. Greenow and went on with his private conversation.

There was no more speaking, nor was there much time for other after-dinner ceremonies. The three horns, the cymbals, the triangle, and the drum were soon heard tuning up behind the banqueting-hall, and the ladies went to the further end of the old boat to make their preparations for the dance. Then it was that the thoughtful care of Mrs. Greenow, in having sent Jeannette with brushes, combs, clean handkerchiefs, and other little knickknackeries, became so apparent. It was said that the widow herself actually changed her cap,—which was considered by some to be very unfair, as there had been an understanding that there should be no dressing. On such occasions ladies are generally willing to forego the advantage of dressing on the condition that other ladies shall forego the same advantage; but when this compact is broken by any special lady, the treason is thought to be very treacherous. It is as though a fencer should remove the button from the end of his foil. But Mrs. Greenow was so good-natured in tendering the services of Jeannette to all the young ladies, and was so willing to share with others those good things

of the toilet which her care had provided, that her cap was forgiven her by the most of those present.

When ladies have made up their minds to dance they will dance let the circumstances of the moment be ever so antagonistic to that exercise. A ploughed field in February would not be too wet, nor the side of a house too uneven. In honest truth the sands of the sea-shore are not adapted for the exercise. It was all very well for Venus to make the promise, but when making it she knew that Adonis would not keep her to her word. Let any lightest-limbed nymph try it, and she will find that she leaves most palpable footing. The sands in question were doubtless compact, firm, and sufficiently moist to make walking on them comfortable; but they ruffled themselves most uncomfortably under the unwonted pressure to which they were subjected. Nevertheless our friends did dance on the sands; finding, however, that quadrilles and Sir Roger de Coverley suited them better than polkas and waltzes.

"No, my friend, no," Mrs. Greenow said to Mr. Cheesacre when that gentleman endeavoured to persuade her to stand up; "Kate will be delighted, I am sure, to join you,—but as for me, you must excuse me."

But Mr. Cheesacre was not inclined at that moment to ask Kate Vavasor to dance with him. He was possessed by an undefined idea that Kate had snubbed him, and as Kate's fortune was, as he said, literally nothing, he was not at all disposed to court her favour at the expense of such suffering to himself.

"I 'm not quite sure that I 'll dance myself," said he, seating himself in a corner of the tent by Mrs.

Greenow's side. Captain Bellfield at that moment was seen leading Miss Vavasor away to a new place on the sands, whither he was followed by a score of dancers; and Mr. Cheesacre saw that now at last he might reap the reward for which he had laboured. He was alone with the widow, and having been made bold by wine, had an opportunity of fighting his battle, than which none better could ever be found. He was himself by no means a poor man, and he despised poverty in others. It was well that there should be poor gentry, in order that they might act as satellites to those who, like himself, had money. As to Mrs. Greenow's money, there was no doubt. He knew it all to a fraction. She had spread for herself, or some one else had spread for her, a report that her wealth was almost unlimited; but the forty thousand pounds was a fact, and any such innocent fault as that little fiction might well be forgiven to a woman endorsed with such substantial virtues. And she was handsome too. Mr. Cheesacre, as he regarded her matured charms, sometimes felt that he should have been smitten even without the forty thousand pounds. "By George! there 's flesh and blood," he had once said to his friend Bellfield before he had begun to suspect that man's treachery. His admiration must then have been sincere, for at that time the forty thousand pounds was not an ascertained fact. Looking at the matter in all its bearings Mr. Cheesacre thought that he could n't do better. His wooing should be fair, honest, and above board. He was a thriving man, and what might not they two do in Norfolk if they put their wealth together?

"Oh, Mr. Cheesacre, you should join them," said

Mrs. Greenow; "they 'll not half enjoy themselves without you. Kate will think that you mean to neglect her."

"I shan't dance, Mrs. Greenow, unless you like to stand up for a set."

"No, my friend, no; I shall not do that. I fear you forget how recent has been my bereavement. Your asking me is the bitterest reproach to me for having ventured to join your festive board."

"Upon my honour I did n't mean it, Mrs. Greenow. I did n't mean it, indeed."

"I do not suspect you. It would have been unmanly."

"And nobody can say that of me. There is n't a man or woman in Norfolk that would n't say I was manly."

"I 'm quite sure of that."

"I have my faults, I 'm aware."

"And what are your faults, Mr. Cheesacre?"

"Well; perhaps I 'm extravagant. But it 's only in these kind of things, you know, when I spend a little money for the sake of making my friends happy. When I 'm about, on the lands at home, I ain't extravagant, I can tell you."

"Extravagance is a great vice."

"Oh, I ain't extravagant in that sense;—not a bit in the world. But when a man 's enamoured, and perhaps looking out for a wife, he does like to be a little free, you know."

"And are you looking out for a wife, Mr. Cheesacre?"

"If I told you I suppose you 'd only laugh at me."

"No; indeed I would not. I am not given to

joking when any one that I regard speaks to me seriously."

"Ain't you though? I 'm so glad of that. When one has really got a serious thing to say, one does n't like to have fun poked at one."

"And, besides, how could I laugh at marriage, seeing how happy I have been in that condition?—so—very—happy," and Mrs. Greenow put up her handkerchief to her eyes.

"So happy that you 'll try it again some day; won't you?"

"Never, Mr. Cheesacre; never. Is that the way you talk of serious things without joking? Anything like love—love of that sort—is over for me. It lies buried under the sod with my poor dear departed saint."

"But, Mrs. Greenow,"—and Cheesacre, as he prepared to argue the question with her, got nearer to her in the corner behind the table,—"but, Mrs. Greenow, care killed a cat, you know."

"And sometimes I think that care will kill me."

"No, by George; not if I can prevent it."

"You 're very kind, Mr. Cheesacre; but there 's no preventing such care as mine."

"Is n't there though? I 'll tell you what, Mrs. Greenow; I 'm in earnest, I am indeed. If you 'll inquire, you 'll find there is n't a fellow in Norfolk pays his way better than I do, or is better able to do it. I don't pay a sixpence of rent, and I sit upon seven hundred acres of as good land as there is in the county. There 's not an acre that won't do me a bullock and a half. Just put that and that together, and see what it comes to. And, mind you, some of

these fellows that farm their own land are worse off than if they 'd rent to pay. They 've borrowed so much to carry on with, that the interest is more than rent. I don't owe a sixpence to e'er a man or e'er a company in the world. I can walk into every bank in Norwich without seeing my master. There ain't any of my paper flying about, Mrs. Greenow. I 'm Samuel Cheesacre, of Oilymead, and it 's all my own." Mr. Cheesacre, as he thus spoke of his good fortunes and firm standing in the world, became impetuous in the energy of the moment, and brought down his fist powerfully on the slight table before them. The whole fabric rattled, and the boat resounded, but the noise he had made seemed to assist him. "It 's all my own, Mrs. Greenow, and the half of it shall be yours if you 'll please to take it;" then he stretched out his hand to her, not as though he intended to grasp hers in a grasp of love, but as if he expected some hand-pledge from her as a token that she accepted the bargain.

"If you 'd known Greenow, Mr. Cheesacre——"

"I 've no doubt he was a very good sort of man."

"If you 'd known him, you would not have addressed me in this way."

"What difference would that make? My idea is that care killed a cat, as I said before. I never knew what was the good of being unhappy. If I find early mangels don't do on a bit of land, then I sow late turnips; and never cry after spilt milk. Greenow was the early mangels; I 'll be the late turnips. Come then, say the word. There ain't a bedroom in my house,—not one of the front ones,—that is n't mahogany furnished!"

"What 's furniture to me?" said Mrs. Greenow, with her handkerchief to her eyes.

Just at this moment Maria's mother stepped in under the canvas. It was most inopportune. Mr. Cheesacre felt that he was progressing well, and was conscious that he had got safely over those fences in the race which his bashfulness would naturally make difficult to him. He knew that he had done this under the influence of the champagne, and was aware that it might not be easy to procure again a combination of circumstances that would be so beneficial to him. But now he was interrupted just as he was expecting success. He was interrupted, and felt himself to be looking like a guilty creature under the eye of the strange lady. He had not a word to say; but drawing himself suddenly a foot and a half away from the widow's side, sat there confessing his guilt in his face.

Mrs. Greenow felt no guilt, and was afraid of no strange eyes. "Mr. Cheesacre and I are talking about farming," she said.

"Oh; farming!" answered Maria's mother.

"Mr. Cheesacre thinks that late turnips are better than early mangels," said Mrs. Greenow.

"Yes, I do," said Cheesacre.

"I prefer the early mangels," said Mrs. Greenow. "I don't think nature ever intended those late crops. What do you say, Mrs. Walker?"

"I dare say Mr. Cheesacre understands what he 's about when he 's at home," said the lady.

"I know what a bit of land can do as well as any man in Norfolk," said the gentleman.

"It may be very well in Norfolk," said Mrs. Greenow, rising from her seat; "but the practice is n't

thought much of in the other counties with which I am better acquainted."

"I 'd just come in to say that I thought we might be getting to the boats," said Mrs. Walker. "My Ophelia is so delicate." At this moment the delicate Ophelia was to be seen, under the influence of the music, taking a distant range upon the sands with Joe Fairstairs' arm round her waist. The attitude was justified by the tune that was in progress, and there is no reason why a galop on the sands should have any special termination in distance, as it must have in a room. But, under such circumstances, Mrs. Walker's solicitude was not unreasonable.

The erratic steps of the distant dancers were recalled and preparations were made for the return journey. Others had strayed besides the delicate Ophelia and the idle Joe, and some little time was taken up in collecting the party. The boats had to be drawn down, and the boatmen fetched from their cans and tobacco-pipes. "I hope they 're sober," said Mrs. Walker, with a look of great dismay.

"Sober as judges," said Bellfield, who had himself been looking after the remains of Mr. Cheesacre's hampers while that gentleman had been so much better engaged in the tent.

"Because," continued Mrs. Walker, "I know that they play all manner of tricks when they 're—in liquor. They 'd think nothing of taking us out to sea, Mrs. Greenow."

"Oh, I do wish they would," said Ophelia.

"Ophelia, mind you come in the boat with me," said her mother, and she looked very savage when she gave the order. It was Mrs. Walker's intention that

that boat should not carry Joe Fairstairs. But Joe and her daughter together were too clever for her. When the boats went off she found herself to be in that one over which Mr. Cheesacre presided, while the sinning Ophelia with her good-for-nothing admirer were under the more mirthful protection of Captain Bellfield.

"Mamma will be so angry," said Ophelia, "and it was all your fault. I did mean to go into the other boat. Don't, Mr. Fairstairs." Then they got settled down in their seats, to the satisfaction, let us hope, of them both.

Mr. Cheesacre had vainly endeavoured to arrange that Mrs. Greenow should return with him. But not only was Captain Bellfield opposed to such a change in their positions, but so also was Mrs. Greenow. "I think we 'd better go back as we came," she said, giving her hand to the captain.

"Oh, certainly," said Captain Bellfield. "Why should there be any change? Cheesacre, old fellow, mind you look after Mrs. Walker. Come along, my hearty." It really almost appeared that Captain Bellfield was addressing Mrs. Greenow as "his hearty," but it must be presumed that the term of genial endearment was intended for the whole boat's load. Mrs. Greenow took her place on the comfortable broad bench in the stern, and Bellfield seated himself beside her, with the tiller in his hand.

"If you 're going to steer, Captain Bellfield, I beg that you 'll be careful."

"Careful,—and with you on board!" said the captain. "Don't you know that I would sooner perish beneath the waves than that a drop of water should touch you roughly?"

"But you see, we might perish beneath the waves together."

"Together! What a sweet word that is;—perish together! If it were not that there might be something better even than that, I would wish to perish in such company."

"But I should not wish anything of the kind, Captain Bellfield, and therefore pray be careful."

There was no perishing by water on that occasion. Mr. Cheesacre's boat reached the pier at Yarmouth first, and gave up its load without accident. Very shortly afterwards Captain Bellfield's crew reached the same place in the same state of preservation. "There," said he, as he handed out Mrs. Greenow. "I have brought you to no harm, at any rate as yet."

"And, as I hope, will not do so hereafter."

"May the heavens forbid it, Mrs. Greenow! Whatever may be our lots hereafter,—yours I mean and mine,—I trust that yours may be free from all disaster. Oh, that I might venture to hope that, at some future day, the privilege might be mine of protecting you from all danger!"

"I can protect myself very well, I can assure you. Good night, Captain Bellfield. We won't take you and Mr. Cheesacre out of your way;—will we, Kate? We have had a most pleasant day."

They were now upon the esplanade, and Mrs. Greenow's house was to the right, whereas the lodgings of both the gentlemen were to the left. Each of them fought hard for the privilege of accompanying the widow to her door; but Mrs. Greenow was self-willed, and upon this occasion would have neither of

them. "Mr. Joe Fairstairs must pass the house," said she, "and he will see us home. Mr. Cheesacre, good night. Indeed you shall not;—not a step." There was that in her voice which induced Mr. Cheesacre to obey her, and which made Captain Bellfield aware that he would only injure his cause if he endeavoured to make further progress in it on the present occasion.

"Well, Kate, what do you think of the day?" the aunt said when she was alone with her niece.

"I never think much about such days, aunt. It was all very well, but I fear I have not the temperament fitted for enjoying the fun. I envied Ophelia Walker because she made herself thoroughly happy."

"I do like to see girls enjoy themselves," said Mrs. Greenow, "I do indeed;—and young men too. It seems so natural; why should n't young people flirt?"

"Or old people either for the matter of that?"

"Or old people either,—if they don't do any harm to anybody. I 'll tell you what it is, Kate; people have become so very virtuous, that they 're driven into all manner of abominable resources for amusement and occupation. If I had sons and daughters I should think a little flirting the very best thing for them as a safety-valve. When people get to be old, there 's a difficulty. They want to flirt with the young people and the young people don't want them. If the old people would be content to flirt together, I don't see why they should ever give it up;—till they 're obliged to give up everything, and go away."

That was Mrs. Greenow's doctrine on the subject of flirtation.

CHAPTER X.

NETHERCOATS.

We will leave Mrs. Greenow with her niece and two sisters at Yarmouth, and returning by stages to London, will call upon Mr. Grey at his place in Cambridgeshire as we pass by. I believe it is conceded by all the other counties that Cambridgeshire possesses fewer rural beauties than any other county in England. It is very flat; it is not well timbered; the rivers are merely dikes; and in a very large portion of the county the farms and fields are divided simply by ditches—not by hedgerows. Such arrangements are, no doubt, well adapted for agricultural purposes, but are not conducive to rural beauty. Mr. Grey's residence was situated in a part of Cambridgeshire in which the above-named characteristics are very much marked. It was in the Isle of Ely, some few miles distant from the cathedral town, on the side of a long straight road, which ran through the fields for miles without even a bush to cheer it. The name of his place was Nethercoats, and here he lived generally throughout the year, and here he intended to live throughout his life.

His father had held a prebendal stall at Ely in times when prebendal stalls were worth more than they are at present, and having also been possessed of a living in the neighbourhood, had amassed a consider-

able sum of money. With this he had during his life purchased the property of Nethercoats, and had built on it the house in which his son now lived. He had married late in life, and had lost his wife soon after the birth of an only child. The house had been built in his own parish, and his wife had lived there for a few months and had died there. But after that event the old clergyman had gone back to his residence in the close at Ely, and there John Grey had had the home of his youth. He had been brought up under his father's eye, having been sent to no public school. But he had gone to Cambridge, had taken college honours, and had then, his father dying exactly at this time, declined to accept a fellowship. His father had left to him an income of some fifteen hundred a year, and with this he sat himself down, near to his college friends, near also to the old cathedral which he loved, in the house which his father had built.

But though Nethercoats possessed no beauty of scenery, though the country around it was in truth as uninteresting as any country could be, it had many delights of its own. The house itself was as excellent a residence for a country gentleman of small means as taste and skill together could construct. I doubt whether prettier rooms were ever seen than the drawing-room, the library, and the dining-room at Nethercoats. They were all on the ground-floor, and all opened out on to the garden and lawn. The library, which was the largest of the three, was a handsome chamber, and so filled as to make it well known in the university as one of the best private collections in that part of England. But perhaps the gardens of Nethercoats constituted its greatest glory. They were

spacious and excellently kept up, and had been originally laid out with that knowledge of gardening without which no garden, merely as a garden, can be effective. And such, of necessity, was the garden of Nethercoats. Fine single forest trees there were none there, nor was it possible that there should have been any such. Nor could there be a clear rippling stream with steep green banks, and broken rocks lying about its bed. Such beauties are beauties of landscape, and do not of their nature belong to a garden. But the shrubs of Nethercoats were of the rarest kind, and had been long enough in their present places to have reached the period of their beauty. Nothing had been spared that a garden could want. The fruit-trees were perfect in their kind, and the glass-houses were so good and so extensive that John Grey in his prudence was sometimes tempted to think that he had too much of them.

It must be understood that there were no grounds, according to the meaning usually given to that word, belonging to the house at Nethercoats. Between the garden and the public road there was a paddock belonging to the house, along the side of which, but divided from it by a hedge and shrubbery, ran the private carriage-way up to the house. This swept through the small front flower-garden, dividing it equally; but the lawns, and indeed the whole of that which made the beauty of the place, lay on the back of the house, on which side opened the windows from the three sitting-rooms. Down on the public road there stood a lodge at which lived one of the gardeners. There was another field of some six or seven acres, to which there was a gate from the corner of the front

paddock, and which went round two sides of the garden. This was Nethercoats, and the whole estate covered about twelve acres.

It was not a place for much bachelor enjoyment of that sort generally popular with bachelors, nevertheless Mr. Grey had been constant in his residence there for the seven years which had now elapsed since he had left his college. His easy access to Cambridge had probably done much to mitigate what might otherwise have been the too great tedium of his life; and he had, prompted thereto by early associations, found most of his society in the close of Ely Cathedral. But, with all the delight he could derive from these two sources, there had still been many solitary hours in his life, and he had gradually learned to feel that he of all men wanted a companion in his home.

His visits to London had generally been short and far between, occasioned probably by some need in the library, or by the necessity of some slight literary transaction with the editor or publisher of a periodical. In one of these visits he had met Alice Vavasor, and had remained in town,—I will not say till Alice had promised to share his home in Cambridgeshire, but so long that he had resolved before he went that he would ask her to do so. He had asked her, and we know that he had been successful. He had obtained her promise, and from that moment all his life had been changed for him. Hitherto at Nethercoats his little smoking-room, his books, and his plants had been everything to him. Now he began to surround himself with an infinity of feminine belongings, and to promise himself an infinity of feminine blessings, wondering

much that he should have been content to pass so long a portion of his life in the dull seclusion which he had endured. He was not by nature an impatient man; but now he became impatient, longing for the fruition of his new idea of happiness,—longing to have that as his own which he certainly loved beyond all else in the world, and which, perhaps, was all he had ever loved with the perfect love of equality. But though impatient, and fully aware of his own impatience, he acknowledged to himself that Alice could not be expected to share it. He could plan nothing now,—could have no pleasure in life that she was not expected to share. But as yet it could not be so with her. She had her house in London, her town society, and her father. And inasmuch as the change for her would be much greater than it would be for him, it was natural that she should require some small delay. He had not pressed her. At least he had not pressed her with that eager pressure which a girl must resist with something of the opposition of a contest, if she resist it at all. But in truth his impatience was now waxing strong, and during the absence in Switzerland, of which we have spoken, he resolved that a marriage very late in the autumn,—that a marriage even in winter, would be better than a marriage postponed till the following year. It was not yet late in August when the party returned from their tour. Would not a further delay of two months suffice for his bride?

Alice had written to him occasionally from Switzerland, and her first two letters had been very charming. They had referred almost exclusively to the tour, and had been made pleasant with some slightly coloured

account of George Vavasor's idleness, and of Kate's obedience to her brother's behests. Alice had never written much of love in her love-letters, and Grey was well enough contented with her style, though it was not impassioned. As for doubting her love, it was not in the heart of the man to do so after it had been once assured to him by her word. He could not so slightly respect himself or her as to leave room for such a doubt in his bosom. He was a man who could never have suggested to himself that a woman loved him till the fact was there before him; but who having ascertained, as he might think, the fact, could never suggest to himself that her love would fail him. Her first two letters from Switzerland had been very pleasant; but after that there had seemed to have crept over her a melancholy which she unconsciously transferred to her words, and which he could not but taste in them,—at first unconsciously, also, but soon with so plain a flavour that he recognised it, and made it a matter of mental inquiry. During the three or four last days of the journey, while they were at Basle and on their way home, she had not written. But she did write on the day after her arrival, having then received from Mr. Grey a letter, in which he told her how very much she would add to his happiness if she would now agree that their marriage should not be postponed beyond the end of October. This letter she found in her room on her return, and this she answered at once. And she answered it in such words that Mr. Grey resolved that he would at once go to her in London. I will give her letter at length, as I shall then be best able to proceed with my story quickly.

"Queen Anne Street,
"August, 186—."

"Dearest John,—We reached home yesterday tired enough, as we came through from Paris without stopping. I may indeed say that we came through from Strasbourg, as we only slept in Paris. I don't like Strasbourg. A steeple, after all, is not everything, and putting the steeple aside, I don't think the style is good. But the hotel was uncomfortable, which goes for so much;—and then we were saturated with beauty of a better kind.

"I got your letter directly I came in last night, and I suppose I had better dash at it at once. I would so willingly delay doing so, saying nice little things the while, did I not know that this would be mere cowardice. Whatever happens I won't be a coward, and therefore I will tell you at once that I cannot let you hope that we should be married this year. Of course you will ask me why, as you have a right to do, and of course I am bound to answer. I do not know that I can give any answer with which you will not have a right to complain. If it be so, I can only ask your pardon for the injury I am doing you.

"Marriage is a great change in life,—much greater to me than to you, who will remain in your old house, will keep your old pursuits, will still be your own master, and will change in nothing,—except in this, that you will have a companion who probably may not be all that you expect. But I must change everything. It will be to me as though I were passing through a grave to a new world. I shall see nothing that I have been accustomed to see, and must abandon all the

ways of life that I have hitherto adopted. Of course I should have thought of this before I accepted you; and I did think of it. I made up my mind that, as I truly loved you, I would risk the change;—that I would risk it for your sake and for mine, hoping that I might add something to your happiness, and that I might secure my own. Dear John, do not suppose that I despair that it may be so; but, indeed, you must not hurry me. I must tune myself to the change that I have to make. What if I should wake some morning after six months living with you, and tell you that the quiet of your home was making me mad?

"You must not ask me again till the winter shall have passed away. If in the meantime I shall find that I have been wrong, I will humbly confess that I have wronged you, and ask you to forgive me. And I will freely admit this. If the delay which I now propose is so contrary to your own plans as to make your marriage, under such circumstances, not that which you had expected, I know that you are free to tell me so, and to say that our engagement shall be over. I am well aware that I can have no right to bind you to a marriage at one period which you had only contemplated as to take place at another period. I think I may promise that I will obey any wish you may express in anything,—except in that one thing which you urged in your last letter.

"Kate is going down to Yarmouth with Mrs. Greenow, and I shall see no more of her probably till next year, as she will be due in Westmoreland after that. George left me at the door when he brought me home, and declared that he intended to vanish out of London. Whether in town or out, he is never to be

seen at this period of the year. Papa offers to go to Ramsgate for a fortnight, but he looks so wretched when he makes the offer, that I shall not have the heart to hold him to it. Lady Macleod very much wants me to go to Cheltenham. I very much want not to go, simply because I can never agree with her about anything; but it will probably end in my going there for a week or two. Over and beyond that, I have no prospects before Christmas which are not purely domestic. There is a project that we shall all eat our Christmas dinner at Vavasor Hall,—of course not including George,—but this project is quite in the clouds, and, as far as I am concerned, will remain there.

"Dear John, let me hear that this letter does not make you unhappy.

"Most affectionately yours,

"Alice Vavasor."

At Nethercoats, the post was brought in at breakfast-time, and Mr. Grey was sitting with his tea and eggs before him, when he read Alice's letter. He read it twice before he began to think what he would do in regard to it, and then referred to one or two others which he had received from Switzerland,—reading them also very carefully. After that, he took up the slouch hat which he had been wearing in the garden before he was called to his breakfast, and, with the letters in his hand, sauntered down among the shrubs and lawns.

He knew, he thought he knew, that there was more in Alice's mind than a mere wish for delay. There was more in it than that hesitation to take at once a

step which she really desired to take, if not now, then after some short interval. He felt that she was unhappy, and unhappy because she distrusted the results of her marriage; but it never for a moment occurred to him that, therefore, the engagement between them should be broken. In the first place he loved her too well to allow of his admitting such an idea without terrible sorrow to himself. He was a constant, firm man, somewhat reserved, and unwilling to make new acquaintances, and, therefore, specially unwilling to break away from those which he had made. Undoubtedly, had he satisfied himself that Alice's happiness demanded such a sacrifice of himself, he would have made it, and made it without a word of complaint. The blow would not have prostrated him, but the bruise would have remained on his heart, indelible, not to be healed but by death. He would have submitted, and no man would have seen that he had been injured. But it did not once occur to him that such a proceeding on his part would be beneficial to Alice. Without being aware of it, he reckoned himself to be the nobler creature of the two, and now thought of her as of one wounded, and wanting a cure. Some weakness had fallen on her, and strength must be give to her from another. He did not in the least doubt her love, but he knew that she had been associated, for a few weeks past, with two persons whose daily conversation would be prone to weaken the tone of her mind. He no more thought of giving her up than a man thinks of having his leg cut off because he has sprained his sinews. He would go up to town and see her, and would not even yet abandon all hope that she might be found sitting at his board when Christmas

should come. By that day's post he wrote a short note to her.

"Dearest Alice," he said, "I have resolved to go to London at once. I will be with you in the evening at eight, the day after to-morrow. Yours,

"J. G."

There was no more in the letter than that.

"And now," she said, when she received it, "I must dare to tell him the whole truth."

CHAPTER XI.

JOHN GREY GOES TO LONDON.

And what was the whole truth? Alice Vavasor, when she declared to herself that she must tell her lover the whole truth, was expressing to herself her intention of putting an end to her engagement with Mr. Grey. She was acknowledging that that which had to be told was not compatible with the love and perfect faith which she owed to the man who was her affianced husband. And yet, why should it be so? She did not intend to tell him that she had been false in her love to him. It was not that her heart had again veered itself round and given itself to that wild cousin of hers. Though she might feel herself constrained to part from John Grey, George Vavasor could never be her husband. Of that she assured herself fifty times during the two days' grace which had been allowed her. Nay, she went farther than that with herself, and pronounced a verdict against any marriage as possible to her if she now decided against this marriage which had for some months past been regarded as fixed by herself and all her friends.

People often say that marriage is an important thing, and should be much thought of in advance, and marrying people are cautioned that there are many who marry in haste and repent at leisure. I am not sure, however, that marriage may not be pondered over too

much; nor do I feel certain that the leisurely repentance does not as often follow the leisurely marriages as it does the rapid ones. That some repent no one can doubt; but I am inclined to believe that most men and women take their lots as they find them, marrying as the birds do by force of nature, and going on with their mates with a general, though not perhaps an undisturbed satisfaction, feeling inwardly assured that Providence, if it have not done the very best for them, has done for them as well as they could do for themselves with all the thought in the world. I do not know that a woman can assure to herself, by her own prudence and taste, a good husband any more than she can add two cubits to her stature; but husbands have been made to be decently good,—and wives too, for the most part, in our country,—so that the thing does not require quite so much thinking as some people say.

That Alice Vavasor had thought too much about it, I feel quite sure. She had gone on thinking of it till she had filled herself with a cloud of doubts which even the sunshine of love was unable to drive from her heavens. That a girl should really love the man she intends to marry,—that, at any rate, may be admitted. But love generally comes easily enough. With all her doubts Alice never doubted her love for Mr. Grey. Nor did she doubt his character, nor his temper, nor his means. But she had gone on thinking of the matter till her mind had become filled with some undefined idea of the importance to her of her own life. What should a woman do with her life? There had arisen round her a flock of learned ladies asking that question, to whom it seems that the proper answer has

never yet occurred. Fall in love, marry the man, have two children, and live happy ever afterwards. I maintain that answer has as much wisdom in it as any other that can be given;—or perhaps more. The advice contained in it cannot, perhaps, always be followed to the letter; but neither can the advice of the other kind, which is given by the flock of learned ladies who ask the question.

A woman's life is important to her,—as is that of a man to him,—not chiefly in regard to that which she shall do with it. The chief thing for her to look to is the manner in which that something shall be done. It is of moment to a young man when entering life to decide whether he shall make hats or shoes; but not of half the moment that will be that other decision, whether he shall make good shoes or bad. And so with a woman;—if she shall have recognised the necessity of truth and honesty for the purposes of her life, I do not know that she need ask herself many questions as to what she will do with it.

Alice Vavasor was ever asking herself that question, and had by degrees filled herself with a vague idea that there was a something to be done; a something over and beyond, or perhaps altogether beside that marrying and having two children;—if she only knew what it was. She had filled herself, or had been filled by her cousins, with an undefined ambition that made her restless without giving her any real food for her mind. When she told herself that she would have no scope for action in that life in Cambridgeshire which Mr. Grey was preparing for her, she did not herself know what she meant by action. Had any one accused her of being afraid to separate herself from

London society, she would have declared that she went very little into society and disliked that little. Had it been whispered to her that she loved the neighbourhood of the shops, she would have scorned the whisperer. Had it been suggested that the continued rattle of the big city was necessary to her happiness, she would have declared that she and her father had picked out for their residence the quietest street in London because she could not bear noise;—and yet she told herself that she feared to be taken into the desolate calmness of Cambridgeshire.

When she did contrive to find any answer to that question as to what she should do with her life,—or rather what she would wish to do with it if she were a free agent, it was generally of a political nature. She was not so far advanced as to think that women should be lawyers and doctors, or to wish that she might have the privilege of the franchise for herself; but she had undoubtedly a hankering after some second-hand political manœuvering. She would have liked, I think, to have been the wife of the leader of a radical opposition, in the time when such men were put into prison, and to have kept up for him his seditious correspondence while he lay in the Tower. She would have carried the answers to him inside her stays,—and have made long journeys down into northern parts without any money, if the cause required it. She would have liked to have around her ardent spirits, male or female, who would have talked of "the cause," and have kept alive in her some flame of political fire. As it was, she had no cause. Her father's political views were very mild. Lady Macleod's were deadly conservative. Kate Vavasor was an aspiring radical

just now, because her brother was in the same line; but during the year of the love-passages between George and Alice, George Vavasor's politics had been as conservative as you please. He did not become a radical till he had quarrelled with his grandfather. Now, indeed, he was possessed of very advanced views,—views with which Alice felt that she could sympathise. But what would be the use of sympathising down in Cambridgeshire? John Grey had, so to speak, no politics. He had decided views as to the treatment which the Roman Senate received from Augustus, and had even discussed with Alice the conduct of the Girondists at the time of Robespierre's triumph; but for Manchester and its cares he had no apparent solicitude, and had declared to Alice that he would not accept a seat in the British House of Commons if it were offered to him free of expense. What political enthusiasm could she indulge with such a companion down in Cambridgeshire?

She thought too much of all this,—and was, if I may say, over-prudent in calculating the chances of her happiness and of his. For, to give her credit for what was her due, she was quite as anxious on the latter head as on the former. "I don't care for the Roman Senate," she would say to herself. "I don't care much for the Girondists. How am I to talk to him day after day, night after night, when we shall be alone together?"

No doubt her tour in Switzerland with her cousin had had some effect in making such thoughts stronger now than they had ever been. She had not again learned to love her cousin. She was as firmly sure as ever that she could never love him more. He had in-

sulted her love; and though she had forgiven him and again enrolled him among her dearest friends, she could never again feel for him that passion which a woman means when she acknowledges that she is in love. That, as regarded her and George Vavasor, was over. But, nevertheless, there had been a something of romance during those days in Switzerland which she feared she would regret when she found herself settled at Nethercoats. She envied Kate. Kate could, as his sister, attach herself on to George's political career, and obtain from it all that excitement of life which Alice desired for herself. Alice could not love her cousin and marry him; but she felt that if she could do so without impropriety she would like to stick close to him like another sister, to spend her money in aiding his career in Parliament as Kate would do, and trust herself and her career into the boat which he was to command. She did not love her cousin; but she still believed in him,—with a faith which he certainly did not deserve.

As the two days passed over her, her mind grew more and more fixed as to its purpose. She would tell Mr. Grey that she was not fit to be his wife—and she would beg him to pardon her and to leave her. It never occurred to her that perhaps he might refuse to let her go. She felt quite sure that she would be free as soon as she had spoken the word which she intended to speak. If she could speak it with decision she would be free, and to attain that decision she would school herself with her utmost strength. At one moment she thought of telling all to her father and of begging him to break the matter to Mr. Grey; but she knew that her father would not understand her,

and that he would be very hostile to her,—saying hard, uncomfortable words, which would probably be spared if the thing were done before he was informed. Nor would she write to Kate, whose letters to her at this time were full of wit at the expense of Mrs. Greenow. She would tell Kate as soon as the thing was done, but not before. That Kate would sympathise with her, she was quite certain.

So the two days passed by and the time came at which John Grey was to be there. As the minute hand on the drawing-room clock came round to the full hour, she felt that her heart was beating with a violence which she could not repress. The thing seemed to her to assume bigger dimensions than it had hitherto done. She began to be aware that she was about to be guilty of a great iniquity, when it was too late for her to change her mind. She could not bring herself to resolve that she would, on the moment, change her mind. She believed that she could never pardon herself such weakness. But yet she felt herself to be aware that her purpose was wicked. When the knock at the door was at last heard she trembled and feared that she would almost be unable to speak to him. Might it be possible that there should yet be a reprieve for her? No; it was his step on the stairs, and there he was in the room with her.

"My dearest," he said, coming to her. His smile was sweet and loving as it ever was, and his voice had its usual manly, genial, loving tone. As he walked across the room Alice felt that he was a man of whom a wife might be very proud. He was tall and very handsome, with brown hair, with bright blue eyes, and a mouth like a god. It was the beauty of his mouth,

—beauty which comprised firmness within itself, that made Alice afraid of him. He was still dressed in his morning clothes; but he was a man who always seemed to be well dressed. "My dearest," he said, advancing across the room, and before she knew how to stop herself or him, he had taken her in his arms and kissed her.

He did not immediately begin about the letter, but placed her upon the sofa, seating himself by her side, and looked into her face with loving eyes,—not as though to scrutinise what might be amiss there, but as though determined to enjoy to the full his privilege as a lover. There was no reproach at any rate in his countenance;—none as yet; nor did it seem that he thought that he had any cause for fear. They sat in this way for a moment or two in silence, and during those moments Alice was summoning up her courage to speak. The palpitation at her heart was already gone, and she was determined that she would speak.

"Though I am very glad to see you," she said, at last, "I am sorry that my letter should have given you the trouble of this journey."

"Trouble!" he said. "Nay, you ought to know that it is no trouble. I have not enough to do down at Nethercoats to make the running up to you at any time an unpleasant excitement. So your Swiss journey went off pleasantly?"

"Yes; it went off very pleasantly." This she said in that tone of voice which clearly implies that the speaker is not thinking of the words spoken.

"And Kate has now left you?"

"Yes; she is with her aunt, at the sea-side."

"So I understand;—and your cousin George?"

"I never know much of George's movements. He may be in town, but I have not seen him since I came back."

"Ah! that is the way with friends living in London. Unless circumstances bring them together, they are in fact farther apart than if they lived fifty miles asunder in the country. And he managed to get through all the trouble without losing your luggage for you very often?"

"If you were to say that we did not lose his, that would be nearer the mark. But, John, you have come up to London in this sudden way to speak to me about my letter to you. Is it not so?"

"Certainly it is so. Certainly I have."

"I have thought much, since, of what I then wrote, very much,—very much, indeed; and I have learned to feel sure that we had better——"

"Stop, Alice; stop a moment, love. Do not speak hurriedly. Shall I tell you what I learned from your letter?"

"Yes; tell me, if you think it better that you should do so."

"Perhaps it may be better. I learned, love, that something had been said or done during your journey, —or perhaps only something thought, that had made you melancholy, and filled your mind for a while with those unsubstantial and indefinable regrets for the past which we are all apt to feel at certain moments of our life. There are few of us who do not encounter, now and again, some of that irrational spirit of sadness which, when over-indulged, drives men to madness and self-destruction. I used to know well what it was before I knew you; but since I have had the hope of

having you in my house, I have banished it utterly. In that I think I have been stronger than you. Do not speak under the influence of that spirit till you have thought whether you, too, cannot banish it."

"I have tried, and it will not be banished."

"Try again, Alice. It is a damned spirit, and belongs neither to heaven nor to earth. Do not say to me the words that you were about to say till you have wrestled with it manfully. I think I know what those words were to be. If you love me, those words should not be spoken. If you do not——"

"If I do not love you, I love no one upon earth."

"I believe it. I believe it as I believe in my own love for you. I trust your love implicitly, Alice. I know that you love me. I think I can read your mind. Tell me that I may return to Cambridgeshire, and again plead my cause for an early marriage from thence. I will not take such speech from you to mean more than it says!"

She sat quiet, looking at him—looking full into his face. She had in nowise changed her mind, but after such words from him, she did not know how to declare to him her resolution. There was something in his manner that awed her,—and something also that softened her.

"Tell me," said he, "that I may see you again to-morrow morning in our usual quiet, loving way, and that I may return home to-morrow evening. Pronounce a yea to that speech from me, and I will ask for nothing further."

"No; I cannot do so," she said. And the tone of her voice, as she spoke, was different to any tone that he had heard before from her mouth.

"Is that melancholy fiend too strong for you?" He smiled as he said this, and as he smiled, he took her hand. She did not attempt to withdraw it, but sat by him in a strange calmness, looking straight before her into the middle of the room. "You have not struggled with it. You know, as I do, that it is a bad fiend and a wicked one,—a fiend that is prompting you to the worst cruelty in the world. Alice! Alice! Alice! Try to think of all this as though some other person were concerned. If it were your friend, what advice would you give her?"

"I would bid her tell the man who had loved her,—that is, if he were noble, good, and great,—that she found herself to be unfit to be his wife; and then I would bid her ask his pardon humbly on her knees." As she said this, she sank down before him on to the floor, and looked up into his face with an expression of sad contrition which almost drew him from his purposed firmness.

He had purposed to be firm,—to yield to her in nothing, resolving to treat all that she might say as the hallucination of a sickened imagination,—as the effect of absolute want of health, for which some change in her mode of life would be the best cure. She might bid him begone in what language she would. He knew well that such was her intention. But he would not allow a word coming from her in such a way to disturb arrangements made for the happiness of their joint lives. As a loving husband would treat a wife, who, in some exceptionable moment of a melancholy malady, should declare herself unable to remain longer in her home, so would he treat her. As for accepting what she might say as his dismissal, he

would as soon think of taking the fruit-trees from the southern wall because the sun sometimes shines from the north. He could not treat either his interests or hers so lightly as that.

"But what if he granted no such pardon, Alice? I will grant none such. You are my wife, my own, my dearest, my chosen one. You are all that I value in the world, my treasure and my comfort, my earthly happiness and my gleam of something better that is to come hereafter. Do you think that I shall let you go from me in that way? No, love. If you are ill I will wait till your illness is gone by; and, if you will let me, I will be your nurse."

"I am not ill."

"Not ill with any defined sickness. You do not shake with ague, nor does your head rack you with aching; but yet you may be ill. Think of what has passed between us. Must you not be ill when you seek to put an end to all that without any cause assigned?"

"You will not hear my reasons,"—she was still kneeling before him and looking up into his face.

"I will hear them if you will tell me that they refer to any supposed faults of my own."

"No, no, no!"

"Then I will not hear them. It is for me to find out your faults, and when I have found out any that require complaint, I will come and make it. Dear Alice, I wish you knew how I long for you." Then he put his hand upon her hair, as though he would caress her.

But this she would not suffer, so she rose slowly, and stood with her hand upon the table in the middle of the room. "Mr. Grey——" she said.

"If you will call me so, I shall think it only a part of your malady."

"Mr. Grey," she continued, "I can only hope that you will take me at my word."

"Oh, but I will not; certainly I will not, if that would be adverse to my own interests."

"I am thinking of your interests; I am, indeed;—at any rate as much as of my own. I feel quite sure that I should not make you happy as your wife,—quite sure; and feeling that, I think that I am right, even after all that has passed, to ask your forgiveness, and to beg that our engagement may be over."

"No, Alice, no; never with my consent. I cannot tell you with what contentment I would marry you to-morrow,—to-morrow, or next month, or the month after. But if it cannot be so, then I will wait. Nothing but your marriage with some one else would convince me."

"I cannot convince you in that way," she said, smiling.

"You will convince me in no other. You have not spoken to your father of this as yet?"

"Not as yet."

"Do not do so, at any rate for the present. You will own that it might be possible that you would have to unsay what you had said."

"No; it is not possible."

"Give yourself and me the chance. It can do no harm. And, Alice, I ask you now for no reasons. I will not ask your reasons, or even listen to them, because I do not believe that they will long have effect even on yourself. Do you still think of going to Cheltenham?"

"I have decided on nothing as yet."

"If I were you, I would go. I think a change of air would be good for you."

"Yes; you treat me as though I were partly silly, and partly insane; but it is not so. The change you speak of should be in my nature, and in yours."

He shook his head and still smiled. There was something in the imperturbed security of his manner which almost made her angry with him. It seemed as though he assumed so great a superiority that he felt himself able to treat any resolve of hers as the petulance of a child. And though he spoke in strong language of his love, and of his longing that she should come to him, yet he was so well able to command his feelings, that he showed no sign of grief at the communication she had made to him. She did not doubt his love, but she believed him to be so much the master of his love,—as he was the master of everything else, that her separation from him would cause him no uncontrollable grief. In that she utterly failed to understand his character. Had she known him better, she might have been sure that such a separation now would with him have carried its mark to the grave. Should he submit to her decision, he would go home and settle himself to his books the next day; but on no following day would he be again capable of walking forth among his flowers with an easy heart. He was a strong, constant man, perhaps over-conscious of his own strength; but then his strength was great. "He is perfect!" Alice had said to herself often. "Oh, that he were less perfect!"

He did not stay with her long after the last word that has been recorded. "Perhaps," he said, as for a

moment he held her hand at parting, "I had better not come to-morrow."

"No, no; it is better not."

"I advise you not to tell your father of this, and doubtless you will think of it before you do so. But if you do tell him, let me know that you have done so."

"Why that?"

"Because in such case I also must see him. God bless you, Alice! God bless you, dearest, dearest Alice!" Then he went, and she sat there on the sofa without moving, till she heard her father's feet as he came up the stairs.

"What, Alice, are you not in bed yet?"

"Not yet, papa."

"And so John Grey has been here. He has left his stick in the hall. I should know it among a thousand."

"Yes; he has been here."

"Is anything the matter, Alice?"

"No, papa, nothing is the matter."

"He has not made himself disagreeable, has he?"

"Not in the least. He never does anything wrong. He may defy man or woman to find fault with him."

"So that is it, is it? He is just a shade too good. Well, I have always thought that myself. But it 's a fault on the right side."

"It 's no fault, papa. If there be any fault, it is not with him. But I am yawning and tired, and I will go to bed."

"Is he to be here to-morrow?"

"No; he returns to Nethercoats early. Good night, papa."

Mr. Vavasor, as he went up to his bedroom, felt sure that there had been something wrong between his daughter and her lover. "I don't know how she 'll ever put up with him," he said to himself, "he is so terribly conceited. I shall never forget how he went on about Charles Kemble, and what a fool he made of himself."

Alice, before she went to bed, sat down and wrote a letter to her cousin Kate.

CHAPTER XII.

MR. GEORGE VAVASOR AT HOME.

It cannot perhaps fairly be said that George Vavasor was an unhospitable man, seeing that it was his custom to entertain his friends occasionally at Greenwich, Richmond, or such places; and he would now and again have a friend to dine with him at his club. But he never gave breakfasts, dinners, or suppers under his own roof. During a short period of his wine-selling career, at which time he had occupied handsome rooms over his place of business in New Burlington Street, he had presided at certain feasts given to customers or expectant customers by the firm; but he had not found this employment to be to his taste, and had soon relinquished it to one of the other partners. Since that he had lived in lodgings in Cecil Street,—down at the bottom of that retired nook, near to the river and away from the Strand. Here he had simply two rooms on the first floor, and hither his friends came to him very rarely. They came very rarely on any account. A stray man might now and then pass an hour with him here; but on such occasions the chances were that the visit had some reference, near or distant, to affairs of business. Eating or drinking there was never any to be found here by the most intimate of his allies. His lodgings were his private

retreat, and they were so private that but few of his friends knew where he lived.

And had it been possible he would have wished that no one should have known his whereabouts. I am not aware that he had any special reason for this peculiarity, or that there was anything about his mode of life that required hiding; but he was a man who had always lived as though secrecy in certain matters might at any time become useful to him. He had a mode of dressing himself when he went out at night that made it almost impossible that any one should recognise him. The people at his lodgings did not even know that he had relatives, and his nearest relaitves hardly knew that he had lodgings. Even Kate had never been at the rooms in Cecil Street, and addressed all her letters to his place of business or his club. He was a man who would bear no inquiry into himself. If he had been out of view for a month, and his friends asked him where he had been, he always answered the question falsely, or left it unanswered. There are many men of whom everybody knows all about all their belongings;—as to whom everybody knows where they live, whither they go, what is their means, and how they spend it. But there are others of whom no man knows anything, and George Vavasor was such a one. For myself I like the open babbler the best. Babbling may be a weakness, but to my thinking mystery is a vice.

Vavasor also maintained another little establishment, down in Oxfordshire; but the two establishments did not even know of each other's existence. There was a third, too, very closely hidden from the world's eye, which shall be nameless; but of the establishment in

Oxfordshire he did sometimes speak, in very humble words, among his friends. When he found himself among hunting men, he would speak of his two nags at Roebury, saying that he had never yet been able to mount a regular hunting stable, and that he supposed he never would; but that there were at Roebury two indifferent beasts of his if any one chose to buy them. And men very often did buy Vavasor's horses. When he was on them they always went well and sold themselves readily. And though he thus spoke of two, and perhaps did not keep more during the summer, he always seemed to have horses enough when he was down in the country. No one ever knew George Vavasor not to hunt because he was short of stuff. And here, at Roebury, he kept a trusty servant, an ancient groom with two little bushy grey eyes which looked as though they could see through a stable door. Many were the long whisperings which George and Bat Smithers carried on at the stable door, in the very back depth of the yard attached to the hunting inn at Roebury. Bat regarded his master as a man wholly devoted to horses, but often wondered why he was not more regular in his sojournings in Oxfordshire. Of any other portion of his master's life Bat knew nothing. Bat could give the address of his master's club in London, but he could give no other address.

But though Vavasor's private lodgings were so very private, he had, nevertheless, taken some trouble in adorning them. The furniture in the sitting-room was very neat, and the book-shelves were filled with volumes that shone with gilding on their backs. The inkstand, the paper-weight, the envelope case on his

writing-table were all handsome. He had a single good portrait of a woman's head hanging on one of his walls. He had a special place adapted for his pistols, others for his foils, and again another for his whips. The room was as pretty a bachelor's room as you would wish to enter, but you might see, by the position of the single easy-chair that was brought forward, that it was seldom appropriated to the comfort of more than one person. Here he sat lounging over his breakfast, late on a Sunday morning in September when all the world was out of town. He was reading a letter which had just been brought down to him from his club. Though the writer of it was his sister Kate, she had not been privileged to address it to his private lodgings. He read it very quickly, running rapidly over its contents, and then threw it aside from him as though it were of no moment, keeping, however, an enclosure in his hand. And yet the letter was of much moment, and made him think deeply. "If I did it at all," said he, "it would be more with the object of cutting him out than any other."

The reader will hardly require to be told that the him in question was John Grey, and that Kate's letter was one instigating her brother to renew his love-affair with Alice. And Vavasor was in truth well inclined to renew it, and would have begun the renewing it at once, had he not doubted his power with his cousin. Indeed it has been seen that he had already attempted some commencement of such a renewal at Basle. He had told Kate more than once that Alice's fortune was not much, and that her beauty was past its prime; and he would no doubt repeat the same objections to his sister with some pretence of disincli-

nation. It was not his custom to show his hand to the players at any game that he played. But he was, in truth, very anxious to obtain from Alice a second promise of her hand. How soon after that he might marry her, would be another question.

Perhaps it was not Alice's beauty that he coveted, nor yet her money exclusively. Nevertheless he thought her very beautiful, and was fully aware that her money would be of great service to him. But I believe that he was true in that word that he spoke to himself, and that his chief attraction was the delight which he would have in robbing Mr. Grey of his wife. Alice had once been his love, had clung to his side, had whispered love to him, and he had enough of the weakness of humanity in him to feel the soreness arising from her affection for another. When she broke away from him he had acknowledged that he had been wrong, and when, since her engagement with Mr. Grey, he had congratulated her, he had told her in his quiet, half-whispered, impressive words how right she was; but not the less, therefore, did he feel himself hurt that John Grey should be her lover. And when he had met this man he had spoken well of him to his sister, saying that he was a gentleman, a scholar, and a man of parts; but not the less had he hated him from the first moment of his seeing him. Such hatred under such circumstances was almost pardonable. But George Vavasor, when he hated, was apt to follow up his hatred with injury. He could not violently dislike a man and yet not wish to do him any harm. At present, as he sat lounging in his chair, he thought that he would like to marry his cousin Alice; but he was quite sure that he would like to be the means

of putting a stop to the proposed marriage between Alice and John Grey.

Kate had been very false to her friend, and had sent up to her brother the very letter which Alice had written to her after that meeting in Queen Anne Street which was described in the last chapter,—or rather a portion of it, for with the reserve common to women she had kept back the other half. Alice had declared to herself that she would be sure of her cousin's sympathy and had written out all her heart on the matter, as was her wont when writing to Kate. "But you must understand," she wrote, "that all that I said to him went with him for nothing. I had determined to make him know that everything between us must be over, but I failed. I found that I had no words at command, but that he was able to talk to me as though I were a child. He told me that I was sick and full of phantasies, and bade me change the air. As he spoke in this way, I could not help feeling how right he was to use me so; but I felt also that he, in his mighty superiority, could never be a fitting husband for a creature so inferior to him as I am. Though I altogether failed to make him understand that it was so, every moment that we were together made me more fixed in my resolution."

This letter from Alice to Kate, Vavasor read over and over again, though Kate's letter to himself, which was the longer one, he had thrown aside after the first glance. There was nothing that he could learn from that. He was as good a judge of the manner in which he would play his own game as Kate could be; but in this matter he was to learn how he would play his game from a knowledge of the other girl's mind.

"She 'll never marry him, at any rate," he said to himself, "and she is right. He 'd make an upper servant of her; very respectable, no doubt, but still only an upper servant. Now with me;—well, I hardly know what I should make of her. I cannot think of myself as a man married." Then he threw her letter after Kate's, and betook himself to his newspaper and his cigar.

It was two hours after this, and he still wore his dressing-gown, and he was still lounging in his easy-chair, when the waiting-maid at the lodgings brought him up word that a gentleman wished to see him. Vavasor kept no servant of his own except that confidential groom down at Bicester. It was a rule with him that people could be better served and cheaper served by other people's servants than by their own. Even in the stables at Bicester the innkeeper had to find what assistance was wanted, and charge for it in the bill. And George Vavasor was no Sybarite. He did not deem it impracticable to put on his own trousers without having a man standing at his foot to hold up the leg of the garment. A valet about a man knows a great deal of a man's ways, and therefore George had no valet.

"A gentleman!" said he to the girl. "Does the gentleman look like a public-house keeper?"

"Well, I think he do," said the girl.

"Then show him up," said George.

And the gentleman was a public-house keeper. Vavasor was pretty sure of his visitor before he desired the servant to give him entrance. It was Mr. Grimes from the Handsome Man public-house and tavern, in the Brompton Road, and he had come

by appointment to have a little conversation with Mr. Vavasor on matters political. Mr. Grimes was a man who knew that business was business, and as such had some considerable weight in his own neighbourhood. With him politics was business, as well as beer, and omnibus-horses, and foreign wines;—in the fabrication of which latter article Mr. Grimes was supposed to have an extended experience. To such as him, when intent on business, Mr. Vavasor was not averse to make known the secrets of his lodging-house; and now, when the idle London world was either at morning church or still in bed, Mr. Grimes had come out by appointment to do a little political business with the lately rejected member for the Chelsea districts.

Vavasor had been, as I have said, lately rejected, and the new member who had beaten him at the hustings had sat now for one session in Parliament. Under his present reign he was destined to the honour of one other session, and then the period of his existing glory,—for which he was said to have paid nearly six thousand pounds,—would be over. But he might be elected again, perhaps for a full period of six sessions; and it might be hoped that this second election would be conducted on more economical principles. To this, the economical view of the matter, Mr. Grimes was very much opposed, and was now waiting upon George Vavasor in Cecil Street, chiefly with the object of opposing the new member's wishes on this head. No doubt Mr. Grimes was personally an advocate for the return of Mr. Vavasor, and would do all in his power to prevent the re-election of the young Lord Kilfenora, whose father, the Marquis of Bunratty, had scattered that six thousand pounds among the electors

and non-electors of Chelsea; but his main object was that money should be spent. "'Tain't altogether for myself," he said to a confidential friend in the same way of business; "I don't get so much on it. Perhaps sometimes not none. Maybe I 've a bill agin some of those gents not paid this werry moment. But it 's the game I looks to. If the game dies away, it 'll never be got up again;—never. Who 'll care about elections then? Anybody 'd go and get hisself elected if we was to let the game go by!" And so, that the game might not go by, Mr. Grimes was now present in Mr. George Vavasor's rooms.

"Well, Mr. Grimes," said George, "how are you this morning? Sit down, Mr. Grimes. If every man were as punctual as you are, the world would go like clock-work; would n't it?"

"Business is business, Mr. Vavasor," said the publican, after having made his salute, and having taken his chair with some little show of mock modesty. "That 's my maxim. If I did n't stick to that, nothing would ever stick to me; and nothing does n't much as it is. Times is very bad, Mr. Vavasor."

"Of course they are. They 're always bad. What was the devil made for, except that they should be bad? But I should have thought you publicans were the last men who ought to complain."

"Lord love you, Mr. Vavasor; why, I suppose of all the men as is put upon, we 're put upon the worst. What 's the good of drawing of beer, if the more you draw the more you don't make. Yesterday as ever was was Saturday, and we drawed three pound ten and nine. What 'll that come to, Mr. Vavasor, when you

reckons it up with the brewer? Why, it 's a next to nothing. You knows that well enough."

"Upon my word I don't. But I know you don't sell a pint of beer without getting a profit out of it."

"Lord love you, Mr. Vavasor. If I had n't nothink to look to but beer I could n't keep a house over my head; no I could n't. That house of mine belongs to Meux's people; and very good people they are too; —have made a sight of money; have n't they, Mr. Vavasor? I has to get my beer from them in course. Why not, when it 's their house? But if I sells their stuff as I gets it, there ain't a halfpenny coming to me out of a gallon. Look at that, now."

"But then you don't sell it as you get it. You stretch it."

"That 's in course. I 'm not going to tell you a lie, Mr. Vavasor. You know what 's what as well as I do, and a sight better, I expect. There 's a dozen different ways of handling beer, Mr. Vavasor. But what 's the use of that, when they can take four or five pounds a day over the counter for their rot-gut stuff at the Cadogan Arms, and I can't do no better nor yet perhaps so well, for a real honest glass of beer? Stretch it! It 's my belief the more you poison their liquor, the more the people likes it!"

Mr. Grimes was a stout man, not very tall, with a mottled red face, and large protruding eyes. As regards his own person, Mr. Grimes might have been taken as a fair sample of the English innkeeper, as described for many years past. But in his outer garments he was very unlike that description. He wore a black, swallow-tailed coat, made, however, to

set very loose upon his back, a black waistcoat, and black pantaloons. He carried, moreover, in his hands a black chimney-pot hat. Not only have the top-boots and breeches vanished from the costume of innkeepers, but also the long, particoloured waistcoat, and the bird's-eye fogle round their necks. They get themselves up to look like Dissenting ministers or undertakers, except that there is still a something about their rosy gills which tells a tale of the spigot and corkscrew.

Mr. Grimes had only just finished the tale of his own hard ways as a publican, when the door-bell was again rung. "There 's Scruby," said George Vavasor, "and now we can go to business."

CHAPTER XIII.

MR. GRIMES GETS HIS ODD MONEY.

THE handmaiden at George Vavasor's lodgings announced "another gent," and then Mr. Scruby entered the room in which were seated George and Mr. Grimes, the publican from the Handsome Man on the Brompton Road. Mr. Scruby was an attorney from Great Marlborough Street, supposed to be very knowing in the ways of metropolitan elections; and he had now stepped round, as he called it, with the object of saying a few words to Mr. Grimes, partly on the subject of the forthcoming contest at Chelsea, and partly on that of the contest last past. These words were to be said in the presence of Mr. Vavasor, the person interested. That some other words had been spoken between Mr. Scruby and Mr. Grimes on the same subjects behind Mr. Vavasor's back I think very probable. But even though this might have been so I am not prepared to say that Mr. Vavasor had been deceived by their combinations.

The two men were very civil to each other in their salutations, the attorney assuming an air of patronising condescension, always calling the other Grimes; whereas Mr. Scruby was treated with considerable deference by the publican, and was always called Mr. Scruby. "Business is business," said the publican as

soon as these salutations were over; "is n't it now, Mr. Scruby?"

"And I suppose Grimes thinks Sunday morning a particularly good time for business," said the attorney, laughing.

"It 's quiet, you know," said Grimes. "But it war n't me as named Sunday morning. It was Mr. Vavasor here. But it is quiet; ain't it, Mr. Scruby?"

Mr. Scruby acknowledged that it was quiet, especially looking out over the river, and then they proceeded to business. "We must pull the governor through better next time than we did last," said the attorney.

"Of course we must, Mr. Scruby; but, Lord love you, Mr. Vavasor, whose fault was it? What notice did I get,—just tell me that? Why, Travers's name was up on the liberal interest ever so long before the governor had ever thought about it."

"Nobody is blaming you, Mr. Grimes," said George.

"And nobody can't, Mr. Vavasor. I done my work true as steel, and their ain't another man about the place as could have done half as much. You ask Mr. Scruby else. Mr. Scruby knows, if e'er a man in London does. I tell you what it is, Mr. Vavasor, them Chelsea fellows, who lives mostly down by the river, ain't like your Maryboners or Finsburyites. It wants something of a man to manage them. Don't it, Mr. Scruby?"

"It wants something of a man to manage any of them as far as my experience goes," said Mr. Scruby.

"Of course it do; and there ain't no one in London knows so much about it as you do, Mr. Scruby. I will say that for you. But the long and the short of it is this;—business is business, and money is money."

"Money is money, certainly," said Mr. Scruby. "There 's no doubt in the world about that, Grimes; —and a deal of it you had out of the last election."

"No, I had n't; begging your pardon, Mr. Scruby, for making so free. What I had to my own cheek was n't nothing to speak of. I was n't paid for my time; that 's what I was n't. You look how a publican's business gets cut up at them elections;—and then the state of the house afterwards! What would the governor say to me if I was to put down painting inside and out in my little bill?"

"It does n't seem to make much difference how you put it down," said Vavasor. "The total is what I look at."

"Just so, Mr. Vavasor; just so. The total is what I looks at too. And I has to look at it a deuced long time before I gets it. I ain't a got it yet; have I, Mr. Vavasor?"

"Well; if you ask me I should say you had," said George. "I know I paid Mr. Scruby three hundred pounds on your account."

"And I got every shilling of it, Mr. Vavasor. I 'm not a going to deny the money, Mr. Vavasor. You 'll never find me doing that. I 'm as round as your hat, and as square as your elbow,—I am. Mr. Scruby knows me; don't you, Mr. Scruby?"

"Perhaps I know you too well, Grimes."

"No you don't, Mr. Scruby; not a bit too well. Nor I don't know you too well, either. I respect you, Mr. Scruby, because you 're a man as understands your business. But as I was saying, what 's three hundred pounds when a man's bill is three hundred and ninety-two thirteen and fourpence?"

"I thought that was all settled, Mr. Scruby," said Vavasor.

"Why you see, Mr. Vavasor, it 's very hard to settle these things. If you ask me whether Mr. Grimes here can sue you for the balance, I tell you very plainly that he can't. We were a little short of money when we came to a settlement, as is generally the case at such times, and so we took Mr. Grimes's receipt for three hundred pounds."

"Of course you did, Mr. Scruby."

"Not on account, but in full of all demands."

"Now Mr. Scruby!" and the publican as he made this appeal looked at the attorney with an expression of countenance which was absolutely eloquent. "Are you going to put me off with such an excuse as that?" so the look spoke plainly enough. "Are you going to bring up my own signature against me, when you know very well that I should n't have got a shilling at all for the next twelve months if I had n't given it? Oh, Mr. Scruby!" That 's what Mr. Grimes's look said, and both Mr. Scruby and Mr. Vavasor understood it perfectly.

"In full of all demands," said Mr. Scruby, with a slight tone of triumph in his voice, as though to show that Grimes's appeal had no effect at all upon his conscience. "If you were to go into a court of law, Grimes, you would n't have a leg to stand upon."

"A court of law? Who 's a going to law with the governor, I should like to know? not I; not if he did n't pay me them ninety-two pounds thirteen and fourpence for the next five years."

"Five years or fifteen would make no difference," said Scruby. "You could n't do it."

"And I ain't a going to try. That 's not the ticket I 've come here about, Mr. Vavasor, this blessed Sunday morning. Going to law, indeed! But, Mr. Scruby, I 've got a family."

"Not in the vale of Taunton, I hope," said George.

"They is at the Handsome Man in the Brompton Road, Mr. Vavasor; and I always feels that I owes my first duty to them. If a man don't work for his family, what do he work for?"

"Come, come, Grimes," said Mr. Scruby. "What is it you 're at? Out with it, and don't keep us here all day."

"What is it I 'm at, Mr. Scruby? As if you did n't know very well what I 'm at. There 's my house;—in all them Chelsea districts it 's the most convenientest of any public as is open for all manner of election purposes. That 's given up to it."

"And what next?" said Scruby.

"The next is, I myself. There is n't one of the lot of 'em can work them Chelsea fellows down along the river unless it is me. Mr. Scruby knows that. Why, I 've been a getting of them up with a view to this very job ever since;—why, ever since they was a talking of the Chelsea districts. When Lord Robert was a coming in for the county on the religious dodge, he could n't have worked them fellows anyhow, only for me. Mr. Scruby knows that."

"Let 's take it all for granted, Mr. Grimes," said Vavasor. "What comes next?"

"Well;—them Bunratty people; it is they as has come next. They know which side their bread is like to be buttered; they do. They 're a bidding for the Handsome Man already; they are."

"And you 'd let your house to the tory party, Grimes!" said Mr. Scruby, in a tone in which disgust and anger were blended.

"Who said anything of my letting my house to the tory party, Mr. Scruby? I 'm as round as your hat, Mr. Scruby, and as square as your elbow; I am. But suppose as all the liberal gents as employs you, Mr. Scruby, was to turn again you and not pay you your little bills, would n't you have your eyes open for customers of another kind? Come now, Mr. Scruby?"

"You won't make much of that game, Grimes."

"Perhaps not; perhaps not. There 's a risk in all these things; is n't there, Mr. Vavasor? I should like to see you a Parliament gent; I should indeed. You'd be a credit to the districts; I really think you would."

"I 'm much obliged by your good opinion, Mr. Grimes," said George.

"When I sees a gent coming forward I knows whether he 's fit for Parliament, or whether he ain't. I says you are fit. But, Lord love you, Mr. Vavasor; it 's a thing a gentleman always has to pay for."

"That 's true enough; a deal more than it 's worth, generally."

"A thing 's worth what it fetches. I 'm worth what I 'll fetch; that 's the long and the short of it. I want to have my balance, that 's the truth. It 's the odd money in a man's bill as always carries the profit. You ask Mr. Scruby else;—only with a lawyer it 's all profit, I believe."

"That 's what you know about it," said Scruby.

"If you cut off a man's odd money," continued the publican, "you break his heart. He 'd almost sooner

have that and leave the other standing. He 'd call the hundreds capital, and if he lost them at last, why he 'd put it down as being in the way of trade. But the odd money;—he looks at that, Mr. Vavasor, as in a manner the very sweat of his brow, the work of his own hand; that 's what goes to his family, and keeps the pot a boiling downstairs. Never stop a man's odd money, Mr. Vavasor; that is, unless he comes it very strong indeed."

"And what is it you want now?" said Scruby.

"I wants ninety-two pounds thirteen and fourpence, Mr. Scruby, and then we 'll go to work for the new fight with contented hearts. If we 're to begin at all, it 's quite time; it is indeed, Mr. Vavasor."

"And what you mean us to understand is, that you won't begin at all without your money," said the lawyer.

"That 's about it, Mr. Scruby."

"Take a fifty-pound note, Grimes," said the lawyer.

"Fifty-pound notes are not so ready," said George.

"Oh, he 'll be only too happy to have your acceptance; won't you, Grimes?"

"Not for fifty pounds, Mr. Scruby. It 's the odd money that I wants. I don't mind the thirteen and four, because that 's neither here nor there among friends, but if I did n't get all them ninety-two pounds I should be a broken-hearted man; I should indeed, Mr. Vavasor. I could n't go about your work for next year so as to do you justice among the electors. I could n't indeed."

"You 'd better give him a bill for ninety pounds at three months, Mr. Vavasor. I have no doubt he has got a stamp in his pocket."

"That I have, Mr. Scruby; there ain't no mistake about that. A bill stamp is a thing that often turns up convenient with gents as mean business like Mr. Vavasor and you. But you must make it ninety-two; you must indeed, Mr. Vavasor. And do make it two months if you can, Mr. Vavasor; they do charge so unconscionable on ninety days at them branch banks; they do indeed."

George Vavasor and Mr. Scruby, between them, yielded at last, so far as to allow the bill to be drawn for ninety-two pounds, but they were staunch as to the time. "If it must be, it must," said the publican, with a deep sigh, as he folded up the paper and put it into the pocket of a huge case which he carried. "And now, gents, I 'll tell you what it is. We 'll make safe work of this here next election. We know what 's to be our little game in time, and if we don't go in and win, my name ain't Jacob Grimes, and I ain't the landlord of the Handsome Man. As you gents has perhaps got something to say among yourselves, I 'll make so bold as to wish you good morning." So, with that, Mr. Grimes lifted his hat from the floor, and bowed himself out of the room.

"You could n't have done it cheaper; you could n't indeed," said the lawyer, as soon as the sound of the closing front door had been heard.

"Perhaps not; but what a thief the man is! I remember your telling me that the bill was about the most preposterous you had ever seen."

"So it was, and if we had n't wanted him again of course we should n't have paid him. But we 'll have it all off his next account, Mr. Vavasor,—every shilling of it. It 's only lent; that 's all;—it 's only lent."

"But one does n't want to lend such a man money, if one could help it."

"That 's true. If you look at it in that light, it 's quite true. But you see we cannot do without him. If he had n't got your bill, he 'd have gone over to the other fellows before the week was over; and the worst of it would have been that he knows our hand. Looking at it all round you 've got him cheap, Mr. Vavasor;—you have indeed."

"Looking at it all round is just what I don't like, Mr. Scruby. But if a man will have a whistle, he must pay for it."

"You can't do it cheap for any of these metropolitan seats; you can't indeed, Mr. Vavasor. That is, a new man can't. When you 've been in four or five times, like old Duncombe, why then, of course, you may snap your fingers at such men as Grimes. But the Chelsea districts ain't dear. I don't call them by any means dear. Now Marylebone is dear,—and so is Southwark. It 's dear, and nasty; that 's what the borough is. Only that I never tell tales, I could tell you a tale, Mr. Vavasor, that 'd make your hair stand on end; I could indeed."

"Ah! the game is hardly worth the candle, I believe."

"That depends on what way you choose to look at it. A seat in Parliament is a great thing to a man who wants to make his way;—a very great thing;—specially when a man 's young, like you, Mr. Vavasor."

"Young!" said George. "Sometimes it seems to me as though I 've been living for a hundred years. But I won't trouble you with that, Mr. Scruby, and I believe I need n't keep you any longer." With that,

he got up and bowed the attorney out of the room, with just a little more ceremony than he had shown to the publican.

"Young!" said Vavasor to himself, when he was left alone. "There 's my uncle, or the old squire,—they 're both younger men than I am. One cares for his dinner, and the other for his bullocks and his trees. But what is there that I care for, unless it is not getting among the sheriffs' officers for debt?" Then he took out a little memorandum-book from his breast-pocket, and having made in it an entry as to the amount and date of that bill which he had just accepted on the publican's behalf, he conned over the particulars of its pages. "Very blue; very blue, indeed," he said to himself when he had completed the study. "But nobody shall say I had n't the courage to play the game out, and that old fellow must die some day, one supposes. If I were not a fool, I should make it up with him before he went; but I am a fool, and shall remain so to the last." Soon after that he dressed himself slowly, reading a little every now and then as he did so. When his toilet was completed, and his Sunday newspapers sufficiently perused, he took up his hat and umbrella and sauntered out.

CHAPTER XIV.

ALICE VAVASOR BECOMES TROUBLED.

KATE VAVASOR had sent to her brother only the first half of her cousin's letter, that half in which Alice had attempted to describe what had taken place between her and Mr. Grey. In doing this, Kate had been a wicked traitor,—a traitor to that feminine faith against which treason on the part of one woman is always unpardonable in the eyes of other women. But her treason would have been of a deeper die had she sent the latter portion, for in that Alice had spoken of George Vavasor himself. But even of this treason, Kate would, I think, have been guilty, had the words which Alice wrote been of a nature to serve her own purpose if read by her brother. But they had not been of this nature. They had spoken of George as a man with whom any closer connection than that which existed at present was impossible, and had been written with the view of begging Kate to desist from making futile attempts in that direction. "I feel myself driven," Alice had said, "to write all this, as otherwise, —if I were simply to tell you that I have resolved to part from Mr. Grey,—you would think that the other thing might follow. The other thing cannot follow. I should think myself untrue in my friendship to you if I did not tell you about Mr. Grey; and you will be untrue in your friendship to me if you take advantage

of my confidence by saying more about your brother." This part of Alice's letter Kate had not sent to George Vavasor;—"But the other thing shall follow," Kate had said, as she read the words for the second time, and then put the papers into her desk. "It shall follow."

To give Kate Vavasor her due, she was, at any rate, unselfish in her intrigues. She was obstinately persistent, and she was moreover unscrupulous, but she was not selfish. Many years ago she had made up her mind that George and Alice should be man and wife, feeling that such a marriage would be good at any rate for her brother. It had been almost brought about, and had then been hindered altogether through a fault on her brother's part. But she had forgiven him this sin as she had forgiven many others, and she was now at work in his behalf again, determined that they two should be married, even though neither of them might be now anxious that it should be so. The intrigue itself was dear to her, and success in it was necessary to her self-respect.

She answered Alice's letter with a pleasant, gossiping epistle, which shall be recorded, as it will tell us something of Mrs. Greenow's proceedings at Yarmouth. Kate had promised to stay at Yarmouth for a month, but she had already been there six weeks, and was still under her aunt's wing.

"Yarmouth, October, 186—.

"Dearest Alice,—Of course I am delighted. It is no good saying that I am not. I know how difficult it is to deal with you, and therefore I sit down to answer your letter with fear and trembling, lest I should say a word too much, and thereby drive you

back, or not say quite enough, and thereby fail to encourage you on. Of course I am glad. I have long thought that Mr. Grey could not make you happy, and as I have thought so, how can I not be glad? It is no use saying that he is good and noble, and all that sort of thing. I have never denied it. But he was not suited to you, and his life would have made you wretched. Ergo, I rejoice. And as you are the dearest friend I have, of course I rejoice mightily.

"I can understand accurately the sort of way in which the interview went. Of course he had the best of it. I can see him so plainly as he stood up in unruffled self-possession, ignoring all that you said, suggesting that you were feverish or perhaps bilious, waving his hand over you a little, as though that might possibly do you some small good, and then taking his leave with an assurance that it would be all right as soon as the wind changed. I suppose it 's very noble in him, not taking you at your word, and giving you, as it were, another chance; but there is a kind of nobility which is almost too great for this world. I think very well of you, my dear, as women go, but I do not think well enough of you to believe that you are fit to be Mr. John Grey's wife.

"Of course I 'm very glad. You have known my mind from the first to the last, and, therefore, what would be the good of my mincing matters? No woman wishes her dearest friend to marry a man to whom she herself is antipathetic. You would have been as much lost to me had you become Mrs. Grey of Nethercoats, Cambridgeshire, as though you had gone to heaven. I don't say but what Nethercoats may be a kind of heaven,—but then one does n't wish

one's friend that distant sort of happiness. A flat Eden I can fancy it, hemmed in by broad dykes, in which cream and eggs are very plentiful, where an Adam and an Eve might drink the choicest tea out of the finest china, with toast buttered to perfection, from year's end to year's end; into which no money troubles would ever find their way, nor yet any naughty novels. But such an Eden is not tempting to me, nor, as I think, to you. I can fancy you stretching your poor neck over the dyke, longing to fly away that you might cease to be at rest, but knowing that the matrimonial dragon was too strong for any such flight. If ever bird banged his wings to pieces against gilded bars, you would have banged yours to pieces in that cage.

"You say that you have failed to make him understand that the matter is settled. I need not say that of course it is settled, and that he must be made to understand it. You owe it to him now to put him out of all doubt. He is, I suppose, accessible to the words of a mortal, god though he be. But I do not fear about this, for, after all, you have as much firmness about you as most people;—perhaps as much as he has at bottom, though you may not have so many occasions to show it.

"As to that other matter I can only say that you shall be obliged, as far as it is in my power to obey you. For what may come out from me by word of mouth when we are together I will not answer with certainty. But my pen is under better control, and it shall not write the offending name.

"And now I must tell you a little about myself;—or rather, I am inclined to spin a yarn, and tell you a great deal. I have got such a lover! But I did

describe him before. Of course it 's Mr. Cheesacre. If I were to say that he has n't declared himself, I should hardly give you a fair idea of my success. And yet he has not declared himself,—and, which is worse, is very anxious to marry a rival. But it 's a strong point in my favour that my rival wants him to take me, and that he will assuredly be driven to make me an offer sooner or later, in obedience to her orders. My aunt is my rival, and I do not feel the least doubt as to his having offered to her half-a-dozen times. But then she has another lover, Captain Bellfield, and I see that she prefers him. He is a penniless scamp and looks as though he drank. He paints his whiskers too, which I don't like; and, being forty, tries to look like twenty-five. Otherwise he is agreeable enough, and I rather approve of my aunt's taste in preferring him.

"But my lover has solid attractions, and allures me on by a description of the fat cattle which he sends to market. He is a man of substance, and should I ever become Mrs. Cheesacre, I have reason to think that I shall not be left in want. We went up to his place on a visit the other day. Oilymead is the name of my future home;—not so pretty as Nethercoats, is it? And we had such a time there! We reached the place at ten and left it at four, and he managed to give us three meals. I 'm sure we had before our eyes at different times every bit of china, delf, glass, and plate in the establishment. He made us go into the cellar, and told us how much wine he had got there, and how much beer. 'It 's all paid for, Mrs. Greenow, every bottle of it,' he said, turning round to my aunt, with a pathetic earnestness, for which I had hardly given

him credit. 'Everything in this house is my own; it 's all paid for. I don't call anything a man's own till it is paid for. Now that jacket that Bellfield swells about with on the sands at Yarmouth,—that 's not his own,—and it 's not like to be either.' And then he winked his eye as though bidding my aunt to think of that before she encouraged such a lover as Bellfield. He took us into every bedroom, and disclosed to us all the glories of his upper chambers. It would have done you good to see him lifting the counterpanes, and bidding my aunt feel the texture of the blankets! And then to see her turn round to me and say: —'Kate, it 's simply the best-furnished house I ever went over in my life!' 'It does seem very comfortable,' said I. 'Comfortable!' said he. 'Yes, I don't think there 's anybody can say that Oilymead is n't comfortable.' I did so think of you and Nethercoats. The attractions are the same;—only in the one place you would have a god for your keeper, and in the other a brute. For myself, if ever I 'm to have a keeper at all, I shall prefer a man. But when we got to the farmyard his eloquence reached the highest pitch. 'Mrs. Greenow,' said he, 'look at that,' and he pointed to heaps of manure raised like the streets of a little city. 'Look at that!' 'There 's a great deal,' said my aunt. 'I believe you,' said he. 'I 've more muck upon this place here than any farmer in Norfolk, gentle or simple; I don't care who the other is.' Only fancy, Alice; it may all be mine; the blankets, the wine, the muck, and the rest of it. So my aunt assured me when we got home that evening. When I remarked that the wealth had been exhibited to her and not to me, she did not affect to deny it, but treated

that as a matter of no moment. 'He wants a wife, my dear,' she said, 'and you may pick him up to-morrow by putting out your hand.' When I remarked that his mind seemed to be intent on low things, and specially named the muck, she only laughed at me. 'Money 's never dirty,' she said, 'nor yet what makes money.' She talks of taking lodgings in Norwich for the winter, saying that in her widowed state she will be as well there as anywhere else, and she wants me to stay with her up to Christmas. Indeed she first proposed the Norwich plan on the ground that it might be useful to me,—with a view to Mr. Cheesacre, of course; but I fancy that she is unwilling to tear herself away from Captain Bellfield. At any rate to Norwich she will go, and I have promised not to leave her before the second week in November. With all her absurdities I like her. Her faults are terrible faults, but she has not the fault of hiding them by falsehood. She is never stupid, and she is very good-natured. She would have allowed me to equip myself from head to foot at her expense, if I would have accepted her liberality, and absolutely offered to give me my trousseau if I would marry Mr. Cheesacre.

"I live in the hope that you will come down to the old place at Christmas. I won't offend you more than I can help. At any rate he won't be there. And if I don't see you there, where am I to see you? If I were you I would certainly not go to Cheltenham. You are never happy there.

"Do you ever dream of the river at Basle? I do; —so often.

"Most affectionately yours,

"KATE VAVASOR."

Alice had almost lost the sensation created by the former portion of Kate's letter by the fun of the latter, before she had quite made that sensation her own. The picture of the Cambridgeshire Eden would have displeased her had she dwelt upon it, and the allusion to the cream and toast would have had the very opposite effect to that which Kate had intended. Perhaps Kate had felt this, and had therefore merged it all in her stories about Mr. Cheesacre. "I will go to Cheltenham," she said to herself. "He has recommended it. I shall never be his wife;—but, till we have parted altogether, I will show him that I think well of his advice." That same afternoon she told her father that she would go to Lady Macleod's at Cheltenham before the end of the month. She was, in truth, prompted to this by a resolution, of which she was herself hardly conscious, that she would not at this period of her life be in any way guided by her cousin. Having made up her mind about Mr. Grey, it was right that she should let her cousin know her purpose; but she would never be driven to confess to herself that Kate had influenced her in the matter. She would go to Cheltenham. Lady Macleod would no doubt vex her by hourly solicitations that the match might be renewed; but, if she knew herself, she had strength to withstand Lady Macleod.

She received one letter from Mr. Grey before the time came for her departure, and she answered it, telling him of her intention;—telling him also that she now felt herself bound to explain to her father her present position. "I tell you this," she said, "in consequence of what you said to me on the matter. My father will know it to-morrow, and on the following

morning I shall start for Cheltenham. I have heard from Lady Macleod and she expects me."

On the following morning she did tell her father, standing by him as he sat at his breakfast. "What!" said he, putting down his teacup and looking up into her face; "What! not marry John Grey!"

"No, papa; I know how strange you must think it."

"And you say that there has been no quarrel?"

"No;—there has been no quarrel. By degrees I have learned to feel that I should not make him happy as his wife."

"It 's d——d nonsense," said Mr. Vavasor. Now such an expression as this from him, addressed to his daughter, showed that he was very deeply moved.

"Oh, papa! don't talk to me in that way."

"But it is. I never heard such trash in my life. If he comes to me I shall tell him so. Not make him happy! Why can't you make him happy?"

"We are not suited to each other."

"But what 's the matter with him? He 's a gentleman."

"Yes; he 's a gentleman."

"And a man of honour, and with good means, and with all that knowledge and reading which you profess to like. Look here, Alice; I am not going to interfere, nor shall I attempt to make you marry any one. You are your own mistress as far as that is concerned. But I do hope, for your sake and for mine,—I do hope that there is nothing again between you and your cousin."

"There is nothing, papa."

"I did not like your going abroad with him, though I did n't choose to interrupt your plan by saying so.

But if there were anything of that kind going on, I should be bound to tell you that your cousin's position at present is not a good one. Men do not speak well of him."

"There is nothing between us, papa; but if there were, men speaking ill of him would not deter me."

"And men speaking well of Mr. Grey will not do the other thing. I know very well that women can be obstinate."

"I have n't come to this resolution without thinking much about it, papa."

"I suppose not. Well;—I can't say anything more. You are your own mistress, and your fortune is in your own keeping. I can't make you marry John Grey. I think you very foolish, and if he comes to me I shall tell him so. You are going down to Cheltenham, are you?"

"Yes, papa; I have promised Lady Macleod."

"Very well. I 'd sooner it should be you than me; that 's all I can say." Then he took up his newspaper, thereby showing that he had nothing further to say on the matter, and Alice left him alone.

The whole thing was so vexatious that even Mr. Vavasor was disturbed by it. As it was not term time he had no signing to do in Chancery Lane, and could not, therefore, bury his unhappiness in his daily labour, —or rather in his labour that was by no means daily. So he sat at home till four o'clock, expressing to himself in various phrases his wonder that "any man alive should ever rear a daughter." And when he got to his club the waiters found him quite unmanageable about his dinner, which he ate alone, rejecting all propositions of companionship. But later in the even-

ing he regained his composure over a glass of whiskey-toddy and a cigar. "She 's got her own money," he said to himself, "and what does it matter? I don't suppose she 'll marry her cousin. I don't think she 's fool enough for that. And after all she 'll probably make it up again with John Grey." And in this way he determined that he might let this annoyance run off him, and that he need not as a father take the trouble of any interference.

But while he was at his club there came a visitor to Queen Anne Street, and that visitor was the dangerous cousin of whom, according to his uncle's testimony, men at present did not speak well. Alice had not seen him since they had parted on the day of their arrival in London,—nor, indeed, had heard of his whereabouts. In the consternation of her mind at this step which she was taking,—a step which she had taught herself to regard as essentially her duty before it was taken, but which seemed to herself to be false and treacherous the moment she had taken it,—she had become aware that she had been wrong to travel with her cousin. She felt sure,—she thought that she was sure,—that her doing so had in nowise affected her dealings with Mr. Grey. She was very certain,—she thought that she was certain,—that she would have rejected him just the same had she never gone to Switzerland. But every one would say of her that her journey to Switzerland with such companions had produced that result. It had been unlucky and she was sorry for it, and she now wished to avoid all communication with her cousin till this affair should be altogether over. She was especially unwilling to see him; but she had not felt it necessary to give any special injunc-

tions as to his admittance; and now, before she had time to think of it,—on the eve of her departure for Cheltenham,—he was in the room with her, just as the dusk of the October evening was coming on. She was sitting away from the fire, almost behind the window curtains, thinking of John Grey, and very unhappy in her thoughts, when George Vavasor was announced. It will of course be understood that Vavasor had at this time received his sister's letter. He had received it, and had had time to consider the matter since the Sunday morning on which we saw him in his own rooms in Cecil Street. "She can turn it all into capital to-morrow, if she pleases," he had said to himself when thinking of her income. But he had also reminded himself that her grandfather would probably enable him to settle an income out of the property upon Alice, in the event of their being married. And then he had also felt that he could have no greater triumph than "walking atop of John Grey," as he called it. His return for the Chelsea districts would hardly be sweeter to him than that.

"You must have thought I had vanished out of the world," said George, coming up to her with his extended hand.

Alice was confused, and hardly knew how to address him. "Somebody told me that you were shooting," she said after a pause.

"So I was, but my shooting is not like the shooting of your great Nimrods,—men who are hunters upon the earth. Two days among the grouse and two more among the partridges are about the extent of it. Capel Court is the preserve in which I am usually to be found."

Alice knew nothing of Capel Court, and said, "Oh, indeed."

"Have you heard from Kate?" George asked.

"Yes, once or twice; she is still at Yarmouth with Aunt Greenow."

"And is going to Norwich, as she says. Kate seems to have made a league with Aunt Greenow. I, who don't pretend to be very disinterested in money matters, think that she is quite right. No doubt Aunt Greenow may marry again, but friends with forty thousand pounds are always agreeable."

"I don't believe that Kate thinks much of that," said Alice.

"Not so much as she ought, I dare say. Poor Kate is not a rich woman, or, I fear, likely to become one. She does n't seem to dream of getting married, and her own fortune is less than a hundred a year."

"Girls who never dream of getting married are just those who make the best marriages at last," said Alice.

"Perhaps so, but I wish I was easier about Kate. She is the best sister a man ever had."

"Indeed she is."

"And I have done nothing for her as yet. I did think, while I was in that wine business, that I could have done anything I pleased for her. But my grandfather's obstinacy put me out of that; and now I 'm beginning the world again,—that is, comparatively. I wonder whether you think I 'm wrong in trying to get into Parliament?"

"No; quite right. I admire you for it. It is just what I would do in your place. You are unmarried, and have a right to run the risk."

"I am so glad to hear you speak like that," said he.

He had now managed to take up that friendly, confidential, almost affectionate tone of talking which he had so often used when abroad with her, and which he had failed to assume when first entering the room.

"I have always thought so."

"But you have never said it."

"Have n't I? I thought I had."

"Not heartily, like that. I know that people abuse me;—my own people, my grandfather, and probably your father,—saying that I am reckless and the rest of it. I do risk everything for my object; but I do not know that any one can blame me,—unless it be Kate. To whom else do I owe anything?"

"Kate does not blame you."

"No; she sympathises with me; she, and she only, unless it be you." Then he paused for an answer, but she made him none. "She is brave enough to give me her hearty sympathy. But perhaps for that very reason I ought to be the more chary in endangering the only support that she is like to have. What is ninety pounds a year for the maintenance of a single lady?"

"I hope that Kate will always live with me," said Alice; "that is, as soon as she has lost her home at Vavasor Hall."

He had been very crafty and had laid a trap for her. He had laid a trap for her, and she had fallen into it. She had determined not to be induced to talk of herself; but he had brought the thing round so cunningly that the words were out of her mouth before she remembered whither they would lead her. She did remember this as she was speaking them, but then it was too late.

"What!—at Nethercoats?" said he. "Neither she

nor I doubt your love, but few men would like such an intruder as that into their household, and of all men Mr. Grey, whose nature is retiring, would like it the least."

"I was not thinking of Nethercoats," said Alice.

"Ah, no; that is it, you see. Kate says so often to me that when you are married she will be alone in the world."

"I don't think she will ever find that I shall separate myself from her."

"No; not by any will of your own. Poor Kate! You cannot be surprised that she should think of your marriage with dread. How much of her life has been made up of her companionship with you;—and all the best of it too! You ought not to be angry with her for regarding your withdrawal into Cambridgeshire with dismay."

Alice could not act the lie which now seemed to be incumbent on her. She could not let him talk of Nethercoats as though it were to be her future home. She made the struggle, and she found that she could not do it. She was unable to find the words which should tell no lie to the ear, and which should yet deceive him. "Kate may still live with me," she said slowly. "Everything is over between me and Mr. Grey."

"Alice!—is that true?"

"Yes, George; it is true. If you will allow me to say so, I would rather not talk about it;—not just at present."

"And does Kate know it?"

"Yes, Kate knows it."

"And my uncle?"

"Yes, papa knows it also."

"Alice, how can I help speaking of it? How can I not tell you that I am rejoiced that you are saved from a thraldom which I have long felt sure would break your heart?"

"Pray do not talk of it further."

"Well; if I am forbidden I shall of course obey. But I own it is hard to me. How can I not congratulate you?" To this she answered nothing, but beat with her foot upon the floor as though she were impatient of his words. "Yes, Alice, I understand. You are angry with me," he continued. "And yet you have no right to be surprised that when you tell me this I should think of all that passed between us in Switzerland. Surely the cousin who was with you then has a right to say what he thinks of this change in your life; at any rate he may do so, if, as in this case, he approves altogether of what you are doing."

"I am glad of your approval, George; but pray let that be an end to it."

After that the two sat silent for a minute or two. She was waiting for him to go, but she could not bid him leave the house. She was angry with herself, in that she had allowed herself to tell him of her altered plans, and she was angry with him because he would not understand that she ought to be spared all conversation on the subject. So she sat looking through the window at the row of gaslights as they were being lit, and he remained in his chair with his elbow on the table and his head resting on his hand.

"Do you remember asking me whether I ever shivered," he said at last; "—whether I ever thought of things that made me shiver? Don't you remember; on the bridge at Basle?"

"Yes; I remember."

"Well, Alice;—one cause for my shivering is over. I won't say more than that now. Shall you remain long at Cheltenham?"

"Just a month."

"And then you come back here?"

"I suppose so. Papa and I will probably go down to Vavasor Hall before Christmas. How much before I cannot say."

"I shall see you at any rate after your return from Cheltenham? Of course Kate will know, and she will tell me."

"Yes; Kate will know. I suppose she will stay here when she comes up from Norfolk. Good-bye."

"Good-bye, Alice. I shall have fewer fits of that inward shivering that you spoke of,—many less, on account of what I have now heard. God bless you, Alice; good-bye."

"Good-bye, George."

As he went he took her hand and pressed it closely between his own. In those days when they were lovers,—engaged lovers, a close, long-continued pressure of her hand had been his most eloquent speech of love. He had not been given to many kisses,—not even to many words of love. But he would take her hand and hold it, even as he looked away from her, and she remembered well the touch of his palm. It was ever cool,—cool, and with a surface smooth as a woman's,—a small hand that had a firm grip. There had been days when she had loved to feel that her own was within it, when she trusted in it, and intended that it should be her staff through life. Now she distrusted it; and as the thoughts of the old days came

upon her, and the remembrance of that touch was recalled, she drew her hand away rapidly. Not for that had she driven from her as honest a man as had ever wished to mate with a woman. He, George Vavasor, had never so held her hand since the day when they had parted, and now on this first occasion of her freedom she felt it again. What did he think of her? Did he suppose that she could transfer her love in that way, as a flower may be taken from one button-hole and placed in another? He read it all, and knew that he was hurrying on too quickly. "I can understand well," he said in a whisper, "what your present feelings are; but I do not think you will be really angry with me because I have been unable to repress my joy at what I cannot but regard as your release from a great misfortune." Then he went.

"My release!" she said, seating herself on the chair from which he had risen. "My release from a misfortune! No;—but my fall from heaven! Oh, what a man he is! That he should have loved me, and that I should have driven him away from me!" Her thoughts travelled off to the sweetness of that home at Nethercoats, to the excellence of that master who might have been hers; and then in an agony of despair she told herself that she had been an idiot and a fool, as well as a traitor. What had she wanted in life that she should have thus quarrelled with as happy a lot as ever had been offered to a woman? Had she not been mad, when she sent from her side the only man that she loved,—the only man that she had ever truly respected? For hours she sat there, all alone, putting out the candles which the servant had lighted for her, and leaving untasted the tea that was brought to her.

Poor Alice! I hope that she may be forgiven. It was her special fault, that when at Rome she longed for Tibur, and when at Tibur she regretted Rome. Not that her cousin George is to be taken as representing the joys of the great capital, though Mr. Grey may be presumed to form no inconsiderable part of the promised delights of the country. Now that she had sacrificed her Tibur, because it had seemed to her that the sunny quiet of its pastures lacked the excitement necessary for the happiness of life, she was again prepared to quarrel with the heartlessness of Rome, and already was again sighing for the tranquillity of the country.

Sitting there, full of these regrets, she declared to herself that she would wait for her father's return, and then, throwing herself upon his love and upon his mercy, would beg him to go to Mr. Grey and ask for pardon for her. "I should be very humble to him," she said; "but he is so good, that I may dare to be humble before him." So she waited for her father. She waited till twelve, till one, till two;—but still he did not come. Later than that she did not dare to wait for him. She feared to trust him on such business returning so late as that,—after so many cigars; after, perhaps, some superfluous beakers of club nectar. His temper at such a moment would not be fit for such work as hers. But if he was late in coming home, who had sent him away from his home in unhappiness? Between two and three she went to bed, and on the following morning she left Queen Anne Street for the Great Western station before her father was up.

CHAPTER XV.

PARAMOUNT CRESCENT.

Lady Macleod lived at No. 3, Paramount Crescent, in Cheltenham, where she occupied a very handsome first-floor drawing-room, with a bedroom behind it, looking over a stable-yard, and a small room which would have been the dressing-room had the late Sir Archibald been alive, but which was at present called the dining-room: and in it Lady Macleod did dine whenever her larger room was to be used for any purposes of evening company. The vicinity of the stable-yard was not regarded by the tenant as among the attractions of the house; but it had the effect of lowering the rent, and Lady Macleod was a woman who regarded such matters. Her income, though small, would have sufficed to enable her to live removed from such discomforts; but she was one of those women who regard it as a duty to leave something behind them,—even though it be left to those who do not at all want it; and Lady Macleod was a woman who wilfully neglected no duty. So she pinched herself, and inhaled the effluvia of the stables, and squabbled with the cabmen, in order that she might bequeath a thousand pounds or two to some Lady Midlothian, who cared, perhaps, little for her, and would hardly thank her memory for the money.

Had Alice consented to live with her, she would

have merged that duty of leaving money behind her in that other duty of finding a home for her adopted niece. But Alice had gone away, and therefore the money was due to Lady Midlothian rather than to her. The saving, however, was postponed whenever Alice would consent to visit Cheltenham; and a bedroom was secured for her which did not look out over the stables. Accommodation was also found for her maid much better than that provided for Lady Macleod's own maid. She was a hospitable, good old woman, painfully struggling to do the best she could in the world. It was a pity that she was such a bore, a pity that she was so hard to cabmen and others, a pity that she suspected all tradesmen, servants, and people generally of a rank of life inferior to her own, a pity that she was disposed to condemn for ever and ever so many of her own rank because they played cards on week days, and did not go to church on Sundays,—and a pity, as I think, above all, that while she was so suspicious of the poor she was so lenient to the vices of earls, earls' sons, and such like.

Alice, having fully considered the matter, had thought it most prudent to tell Lady Macleod by letter what she had done in regard to Mr. Grey. There had been many objections to the writing of such a letter, but there appeared to be stronger objection to that telling it face to face which would have been forced upon her had she not written. There would in such case have arisen on Lady Macleod's countenance a sternness of rebuke which Alice did not choose to encounter. The same sternness of rebuke would come upon the countenance on receipt of the written information; but it would come in its most aggravated

form on the immediate receipt of the letter, and some of its bitterness would have passed away before Alice's arrival. I think that Alice was right. It is better for both parties that any great offence should be confessed by letter.

But Alice trembled as the cab drew up at No. 3, Paramount Crescent. She met her aunt, as was usual, just inside the drawing-room door, and she saw at once that if any bitterness had passed away from that face, the original bitterness must indeed have been bitter. She had so timed her letter that Lady Macleod should have no opportunity of answering it. The answer was written there in the mingled anger and sorrow of those austere features.

"Alice!" she said, as she took her niece in her arms and kissed her; "oh, Alice, what is this?"

"Yes, aunt; it is very bad, I know," and poor Alice tried to make a jest of it. "Young ladies are very wicked when they don't know their own minds. But if they have n't known them and have been wicked, what can they do but repent?"

"Repent!" said Lady Macleod. "Yes; I hope you will repent. Poor Mr. Grey;—what must he think of it?"

"I can only hope, aunt, that he won't think of it at all for very long."

"That 's nonsense, my dear. Of course he 'll think of it, and of course you 'll marry him."

"Shall I, aunt?"

"Of course you will. Why, Alice, has n't it been all settled among the families? Lady Midlothian knew all the particulars of it just as well as I did. And is not your word pledged to him? I really don't under-

stand what you mean. I don't see how it is possible you should go back. Gentlemen when they do that kind of thing are put out of society;—but I really think it is worse in a woman."

"Then they may if they please put me out of society;—only that I don't know that I 'm particularly in it."

"And the wickedness of the thing, Alice! I 'm obliged to say so."

"When you talk to me about society, aunt, and about Lady Midlothian, I give up to you, willingly;—the more willingly, perhaps, because I don't care much for one or the other." Here Lady Macleod tried to say a word; but she failed, and Alice went on, boldly looking up into her aunt's face, which became a shade more bitter than ever. "But when you tell me about wickedness and my conscience, then I must be my own judge. It is my conscience, and the fear of committing wickedness, that has made me do this."

"You should submit to be guided by your elders, Alice."

"No; my elders in such a matter as this cannot teach me. It cannot be right that I should go to a man's house and be his wife, if I do not think that I can make him happy."

"Then why did you accept him?"

"Because I was mistaken. I am not going to defend that. If you choose to scold me for that, you may do so, aunt, and I will not answer you. But as to marrying him or not marrying him now,—as to that, I must judge for myself."

"It was a pity you did not know your own mind earlier."

"It was a pity,—a great pity. I have done myself an injury that is quite irretrievable;—I know that, and am prepared to bear it. I have done him, too, an injustice which I regret with my whole heart. I can only excuse myself by saying that I might have done him a worse injustice."

All this was said at the very moment of her arrival, and the greeting did not seem to promise much for the happiness of the next month; but perhaps it was better for them both that the attack and the defence should thus be made suddenly, at their first meeting. It is better to pull the string at once when you are in the shower-bath, and not to stand shivering, thinking of the inevitable shock which you can only postpone for a few minutes. Lady Macleod in this case had pulled the string, and thus reaped the advantage of her alacrity.

"Well, my dear," said her ladyship, "I suppose you will like to go upstairs and take off your bonnet. Mary shall bring you some tea when you come down." So Alice escaped, and when she returned to the comfort of her cup of tea in the drawing-room, the fury of the storm had passed away. She sat talking of other things till dinner; and though Lady Macleod did during the evening make one allusion to "poor Mr. Grey," the subject was allowed to drop. Alice was very tender as to her aunt's ailments, was more than ordinarily attentive to the long list of Cheltenham iniquities which was displayed to her, and refrained from combating any of her aunt's religious views. After a while they got upon the subject of Aunt Greenow, for whose name Lady Macleod had a special aversion,—as indeed she had for all the Vavasor side of Alice's

family; and then Alice offered to read and did read to her aunt many pages out of one of those terrible books of wrath, which from time to time come forth and tell us that there is no hope for us. Lady Macleod liked to be so told; and as she now, poor woman, could not read at nights herself, she enjoyed her evening.

Lady Macleod no doubt did enjoy her niece's sojourn at Cheltenham, but I do not think it could have been pleasant to Alice. On the second day nothing was said about Mr. Grey, and Alice hoped that by her continual readings in the book of wrath her aunt's heart might be softened towards her. But it seemed that Lady Macleod measured the periods of respite, for on the third day and on the fifth she returned to the attack. "Did John Grey still wish that the match should go on?" she asked, categorically. It was in vain that Alice tried to put aside the question, and begged that the matter might not be discussed. Lady Macleod insisted on her right to carry on the examination, and Alice was driven to acknowledge that she believed he did wish it. She could hardly say otherwise, seeing that she had at that moment a letter from him in her pocket, in which he still spoke of his engagement as being absolutely binding on him, and expressed a hope that this change from London to Cheltenham would bring her round and set everything to rights. He certainly did, in a fashion, wave his hand over her, as Kate had said of him. This letter Alice had resolved that she would not answer. He would probably write again, and she would beg him to desist. Instead of Cheltenham bringing her round, Cheltenham had made her firmer than ever in her

resolution. I am inclined to think that the best mode of bringing her round at this moment would have been a course of visits from her cousin George, and a series of letters from her cousin Kate. Lady Macleod's injunctions would certainly not bring her round.

After ten days, ten terrible days, devoted to discussions on matrimony in the morning, and to the book of wrath in the evening,—relieved by two tea-parties, in which the sins of Cheltenham were discussed at length,—Lady Macleod herself got a letter from Mr. Grey. Mr. Grey's kindest compliments to Lady Macleod. He believed that Lady Macleod was aware of the circumstances of his engagement with Miss Vavasor. Might he call on Miss Vavasor at Lady Macleod's house in Cheltenham? and might he also hope to have the pleasure of making Lady Macleod's acquaintance? Alice had been in the room when her aunt received this letter, but her aunt had said nothing, and Alice had not known from whom the letter had come. When her aunt crept away with it after breakfast she had suspected nothing, and had never imagined that Lady Macleod, in the privacy of her own room looking out upon the stables, had addressed a letter to Nethercoats. But such a letter had been addressed to Nethercoats, and Mr. Grey had been informed that he would be received in Paramount Crescent with great pleasure.

Mr. Grey had even indicated the day on which he would come, and on the morning of that day Lady Macleod had presided over the two teacups in a state of nervous excitement which was quite visible to Alice. More than once Alice asked little questions, not supposing that she was specially concerned in the matter

which had caused her aunt's fidgety restlessness, but observing it so plainly that it was almost impossible not to allude to it. "There 's nothing the matter, my dear, at all," at last Lady Macleod said; but as she said so she was making up her mind that the moment had not come in which she must apprise Alice of Mr. Grey's intended visit. As Alice had questioned her at the breakfast-table she would say nothing about it then, but waited till the teacups were withdrawn, and till the maid had given her last officious poke to the fire. Then she began. She had Mr. Grey's letter in her pocket, and as she prepared herself to speak, she pulled it out and held it on the little table before her.

"Alice," she said, "I expect a visitor here to-day."

Alice knew instantly who was the expected visitor. Probably any girl under such circumstances would have known equally well. "A visitor, aunt!" she said, and managed to hide her knowledge admirably.

"Yes, Alice, a visitor. I should have told you before, only I thought,—I thought I had better not. It is Mr.—Mr. Grey."

"Indeed, aunt! Is he coming to see you?"

"Well;—he is desirous, no doubt, of seeing you more especially; but he has expressed a wish to make my acquaintance, which I cannot, under the circumstances, think is unnatural. Of course, Alice, he must want to talk over this affair with your friends."

"I wish I could have spared them," said Alice,—"I wish I could."

"I have brought his letter here, and you can see it if you please. It is very nicely written, and as far as I am concerned I should not think of refusing to see

him. And now comes the question. What are we to do with him? Am I to ask him to dinner? I take it for granted that he will not expect me to offer him a bed, as he knows that I live in lodgings."

"Oh no, aunt; he certainly will not expect that."

"But ought I to ask him to dinner? I should be most happy to entertain him, though you know how very scanty my means of doing so are;—but I really do not know how it might be,—between you and him, I mean."

"We should not fight, aunt."

'No, I suppose not;—but if you cannot be affectionate in your manner to him——"

"I will not answer for my manners, aunt; but you may be sure of this,—that I should be affectionate in my heart. I shall always regard him as a dearly loved friend; though for many years, no doubt, I shall be unable to express my friendship."

"That may be all very well, Alice, but it will not be what he will want. I think upon the whole that I had better not ask him to dinner."

"Perhaps not, aunt."

"It is a period of the day in which any special constraint among people is more disagreeable than at any other time, and then at dinner the servants must see it. I think there might be some awkwardness if he were to dine here."

"I really think there would," said Alice, anxious to have the subject dropped.

"I hope he won't think that I am inhospitable. I should be so happy to do the best I could for him, for I regard him, Alice, quite as though he were to be your husband. And when anybody at all connected

with me has come to Cheltenham I always have asked them to dine, and then I have Gubbins's man to come and wait at table,—as you know."

"Of all men in the world Mr. Grey is the last to think about it."

"That should only make me the more careful. But I think it would perhaps be more comfortable if he were to come in the evening."

"Much more comfortable, aunt."

"I suppose he will be here in the afternoon, before dinner, and we had better wait at home for him. I dare say he 'll want to see you alone, and therefore I 'll retire to my own room,"—looking over the stables! Dear old lady. "But if you wish it, I will receive him first—and then Martha,"—Martha was Alice's maid,—"can fetch you down."

This discussion as to the propriety or impropriety of giving her lover a dinner had not been pleasant to Alice, but, nevertheless, when it was over she felt grateful to Lady Macleod. There was an attempt in the arrangement to make Mr. Grey's visit as little painful as possible; and though such a discussion at such a time might as well have been avoided, the decision to which her ladyship had at last come with reference both to the dinner and the management of the visit was, no doubt, the right one.

Lady Macleod had been quite correct in all her anticipations. At three o'clock Mr. Grey was announced, and Lady Macleod, alone, received him in her drawing-room. She had intended to give him a great deal of good advice, to bid him still keep up his heart and as it were hold up his head, to confess to him how very badly Alice was behaving, and to express her

entire concurrence with that theory of bodily ailment as the cause and origin of her conduct. But she found that Mr. Grey was a man to whom she could not give much advice. It was he who did the speaking at this conference, and not she. She was overawed by him after the first three minutes. Indeed her first glance at him had awed her. He was so handsome,—and then, in his beauty, he had so quiet and almost saddened an air! Strange to say that after she had seen him, Lady Macleod entertained for him an infinitely higher admiration than before, and yet she was less surprised than she had been at Alice's refusal of him. The conference was very short; and Mr. Grey had not been a quarter of an hour in the house before Martha attended upon her mistress with her summons.

Alice was ready and came down instantly. She found Mr. Grey standing in the middle of the room waiting to receive her, and the look of majesty which had cowed Lady Macleod had gone from his countenance. He could not have received her with a kinder smile, had she come to him with a promise that she would at this meeting name the day for their marriage. "At any rate it does not make him unhappy," she said to herself.

"You are not angry," he said, "that I should have followed you all the way here, to see you."

"No, certainly; not angry, Mr. Grey. All anger that there may be between us must be on your side. I feel that thoroughly."

"Then there shall be none on either side. Whatever may be done, I will not be angry with you. Your father advised me to come down here to you."

"You have seen him, then?"

"Yes, I have seen him. I was in London the day you left."

"It is so terrible to think that I should have brought upon you all this trouble."

"You will bring upon me much worse trouble than that, unless——. But I have not now come down here to tell you that. I believe that according to rule in such matters I should not have come to you at all, but I don't know that I care much about such rules."

"It is I that have broken all rules."

"When a lady tells a gentleman that she does not wish to see more of him——"

"Oh, Mr. Grey, I have not told you that."

"Have you not? I am glad at any rate to hear you deny it. But you will understand what I mean. When a gentleman gets his dismissal from a lady he should accept it,—that is, his dismissal under such circumstances as I have received mine. But I cannot lay down my love in that way; nor, maintaining my love, can I give up the battle. It seems to me that I have a right at any rate to know something of your comings and goings as long as,—unless, Alice, you should take another name than mine."

"My intention is to keep my own." This she said in the lowest possible tone,—almost in a whisper,—with her eyes fixed upon the ground.

"And you will not deny me that right?"

"I cannot hinder you. Whatever you may do, I myself have sinned so against you that I can have no right to blame you."

"There shall be no question between us of injury from one to the other. In any conversation that we may have, or in any correspondence——"

"Oh, Mr. Grey, do not ask me to write."

"Listen to me. Should there be any on either side, there shall be no idea of any wrong done."

"But I have done you wrong;—great wrong."

"No, Alice; I will not have it so. When I asked you to accept my hand,—begging the greatest boon which it could ever come to my lot to ask from a fellow-mortal,—I knew well how great was your goodness to me when you told me that it should be mine. Now, that you refuse it, I know also that you are good, thinking that in doing so you are acting for my welfare,—thinking more of my welfare than of your own."

"Oh yes, yes; it is so, Mr. Grey; indeed it is so."

"Believing that, how can I talk of wrong? That you are wrong in your thinking on this subject,—that your mind has become twisted by false impressions,—that I believe. But I cannot therefore love you less,—nor, so believing, can I consider myself to be injured. Nor am I even so little selfish as you are. I think if you were my wife that I could make you happy; but I feel sure that my happiness depends on your being my wife."

She looked up into his face, but it was still serene in all its manly beauty. Her cousin George, if he were moved to strong feeling, showed it at once in his eyes,—in his mouth, in the whole visage of his countenance. He glared in his anger, and was impassioned in his love. But Mr. Grey when speaking of the happiness of his entire life, when confessing that it was now at stake with a decision against him that would be ruinous to it, spoke without a quiver in his voice,

and had no more sign of passion in his face than if he were telling his gardener to move a rose-tree.

"I hope—and believe that you will find your happiness elsewhere, Mr. Grey."

"Well; we can but differ, Alice. In that we do differ. And now I will say one word to explain why I have come here. If I were to write to you against your will, it would seem that I were persecuting you. I cannot bring myself to do that, even though I had the right. But if I were to let you go from me, taking what you have said to me and doing nothing, it would seem that I had accepted your decision as final. I do not do so. I will not do so. I come simply to tell you that I am still your suitor. If you will let me, I will see you again early in January,—as soon as you have returned to town. You will hardly refuse to see me."

"No," she said; "I cannot refuse to see you."

"Then it shall be so," he said, "and I will not trouble you with letters, nor will I trouble you longer now with words. Tell your aunt that I have said what I came to say, and that I give her my kindest thanks." Then he took her hand and pressed it,—not as George Vavasor had pressed it,—and was gone. When Lady Macleod returned, she found that the question of the evening's tea arrangements had settled itself.

CHAPTER XVI.

THE ROEBURY CLUB.

It has been said that George Vavasor had a little establishment at Roebury, down in Oxfordshire, and thither he betook himself about the middle of November. He had been long known in this county, and whether or no men spoke well of him as a man of business in London, men spoke well of him down there, as one who knew how to ride to hounds. Not that Vavasor was popular among fellow-sportsmen. It was quite otherwise. He was not a man that made himself really popular in any social meetings of men. He did not himself care for the loose little talkings, half flat and half sharp, of men when they meet together in idleness. He was not open enough in his nature for such popularity. Some men were afraid of him, and some suspected him. There were others who made up to him, seeking his intimacy, but these he usually snubbed, and always kept at a distance. Though he had indulged in all the ordinary pleasures of young men, he had never been a jovial man. In his conversations with men he always seemed to think that he should use his time towards serving some purpose of business. With women he was quite the reverse. With women he could be happy. With women he could really associate. A woman he could really love;—but I doubt whether for all that he could treat a woman well.

But he was known in the Oxfordshire country as a man who knew what he was about, and such men are always welcome. It is the man who does not know how to ride that is made uncomfortable in the hunting field by cold looks or expressed censure. And yet it is very rarely that such men do any real harm. Such a one may now and then get among the hounds or override the hunt, but it is not often so. Many such complaints are made; but in truth the too forward man, who presses the dogs, is generally one who can ride, but is too eager or too selfish to keep in his proper place. The bad rider, like the bad whist player, pays highly for what he does not enjoy, and should be thanked. But at both games he gets cruelly snubbed. At both games George Vavasor was great and he never got snubbed.

There were men who lived together at Roebury in a kind of club,—four or five of them, who came thither from London, running backwards and forwards as hunting arrangements enabled them to do so,—a brewer or two and a banker, with a would-be fast attorney, a sporting literary gentleman, and a young unmarried Member of Parliament who had no particular home of his own in the country. These men formed the Roebury Club, and a jolly life they had of it. They had their own wine closet at the King's Head,—or Roebury Inn, as the house had come to be popularly called,—and supplied their own game. The landlord found everything else; and as they were not very particular about their bills, they were allowed to do pretty much as they liked in the house. They were rather imperious, very late in their hours, sometimes, though not often, noisy, and once there had been a hasty quarrel

which had made the landlord in his anger say that the club should be turned out of his house. But they paid well, chaffed the servants much oftener than they bullied them; and on the whole were very popular.

To this club Vavasor did not belong, alleging that he could not afford to live at their pace, and alleging, also, that his stays at Roebury were not long enough to make him a desirable member. The invitation to him was not repeated and he lodged elsewhere in the little town. But he occasionally went in of an evening, and would make up with the members a table at whist.

He had come down to Roebury by mail train, ready for hunting the next morning, and walked into the club-room just at midnight. There he found Maxwell the banker, Grindley the would-be fast attorney, and Calder Jones the Member of Parliament, playing dummy. Neither of the brewers was there, nor was the sporting literary gentleman.

"Here 's Vavasor," said Maxwell, "and now we won't play this blackguard game any longer. Somebody told me, Vavasor, that you were gone away."

"Gone away;—what, like a fox?"

"I don't know what it was; that something had happened to you since last season; that you were married, or dead, or gone abroad. By George, I 've lost the trick after all! I hate dummy like the devil. I never hold a card in dummy's hand. Yes, I know; that 's seven points on each side. Vavasor, come and cut. Upon my word if any one had asked me, I should have said you were dead."

"But you see, nobody ever does think of asking you anything."

"What you probably mean," said Grindley, "is that

Vavasor was not returned for Chelsea last February; but you 've seen him since that. Are you going to try it again, Vavasor?"

"If you 'll lend me the money I will."

"I don't see what on earth a man gains by going into the House," said Calder Jones. "I could n't help myself, as it happened, but, upon my word, it 's a deuce of a bore. A fellow thinks he can do as he likes about going,—but he can't. It would n't do for me to give it up, because——"

"Oh no, of course not; where should we all be?" said Vavasor.

"It 's you and me, Grindems," said Maxwell. "D—— Parliament, and now let 's have a rubber."

They played till three and Mr. Calder lost a good deal of money,—a good deal of money in a little way, for they never played above ten-shilling points, and no bet was made for more than a pound or two. But Vavasor was the winner, and when he left the room he became the subject of some ill-natured remarks.

"I wonder he likes coming in here," said Grindley, who had himself been the man to invite him to belong to the club, and who had at one time indulged the ambition of an intimacy with George Vavasor.

"I can't understand it," said Calder Jones, who was a little bitter about his money. "Last year he seemed to walk in just when he liked, as though he were one of us."

"He 's a bad sort of fellow," said Grindley; "he 's so uncommonly dark. I don't know where on earth he gets his money from. He was heir to some small property in the north, but he lost every shilling of that when he was in the wine trade."

"You 're wrong there, Grindems," said Maxwell,—making use of a playful nickname which he had invented for his friend. "He made a pot of money at the wine business, and had he stuck to it he would have been a rich man."

"He 's lost it all since then, and that place in the north into the bargain."

"Wrong again, Grindems, my boy. If old Vavasor were to die to-morrow, Vavasor Hall would go just as he might choose to leave it. George may be a ruined man for aught I know——"

"There 's no doubt about that, I believe," said Grindley.

"Perhaps not, Grindems; but he can't have lost Vavasor Hall, because he has never as yet had an interest in it. He 's the natural heir, and will probably get it some day."

"All the same," said Calder Jones, "is n't it rather odd he should come in here?"

"We 've asked him often enough," said Maxwell; "not because we like him, but because we want him so often to make up a rubber. I don't like George Vavasor, and I don't know who does; but I like him better than dummy. And I 'd sooner play whist with men I don't like, Grindems, than I 'd not play at all." A bystander might have thought from the tone of Mr. Maxwell's voice that he was alluding to Mr. Grindley himself, but Mr. Grindley did n't seem to take it in that light.

"That 's true, of course," said he. "We can't pick men just as we please. But I certainly did n't think that he 'd make it out for another season."

The club breakfasted the next morning at nine

o'clock, in order that they might start at half-past for the meet at Edgehill. Edgehill is twelve miles from Roebury, and the hacks would do it in an hour and a half,—or perhaps a little less. "Does anybody know anything about that brown horse of Vavasor's?" said Maxwell. "I saw him coming into the yard yesterday with that old groom of his."

"He had a brown horse last season," said Grindley; —"a little thing that went very fast, but was n't quite sound on the road."

"That was a mare," said Maxwell, "and he sold her to Cinquebars." *

"For a hundred and fifty," said Calder Jones, "and she was n't worth the odd fifty."

"He won seventy with her at Leamington," said Maxwell, "and I doubt whether he 'd take his money now."

"Is Cinquebars coming down here this year?"

"I don't know," said Maxwell. "I hope not. He 's the best fellow in the world, but he can't ride, and he don't care for hunting, and he makes more row than any fellow I ever met. I wish some fellow could tell me something about that fellow's brown horse."

"I 'd never buy a horse of Vavasor's if I were you," said Grindley. "He never has anything that 's all right all round."

"And who has?" said Maxwell, as he took into his plate a second mutton chop, which had just been brought up hot into the room especially for him.

* Ah, my friend, from whom I have borrowed this scion of the nobility! Had he been left with us he would have forgiven me my little theft, and now that he has gone I will not change the name.

"That 's the mistake men make about horses, and that 's why there 's so much cheating. I never ask for a warranty with a horse, and don't very often have a horse examined. Yet I do as well as others. You can't have perfect horses any more than you can perfect men, or perfect women. You put up with red hair, or bad teeth, or big feet,—or sometimes with the devil of a voice. But a man when he wants a horse won't put up with anything! Therefore those who 've got horses to sell must lie. When I go into the market with three hundred pounds I expect a perfect animal. As I never do that now I never expect a perfect animal. I like 'em to see; I like 'em to have four legs; and I like 'em to have a little wind. I don't much mind anything else."

"By Jove, you 're about right," said Calder Jones. The reader will therefore readily see that Mr. Maxwell the banker reigned as king in that club.

Vavasor had sent two horses on in charge of Bat Smithers, and followed on a pony about fourteen hands high, which he had ridden as a cover hack for the last four years. He did not start till near ten, but he was able to catch Bat with his two horses about a mile and a half on that side of Edgehill. "Have you managed to come along pretty clean?" the master asked as he came up with his servant.

"They be the most beastly roads in all England," said Bat, who always found fault with any county in which he happened to be located. "But I 'll warrant I 'm cleaner than most on 'em. What for any county should make such roads as them I never could tell."

"The roads about there are bad, certainly;—very bad. But I suppose they would have been better had

Providence sent better materials. And what do you think of the brown horse, Bat?"

"Well, sir." He said no more, and that he said with a drawl.

"He 's as fine an animal to look at as ever I put my eye on," said George.

"He 's all that," said Bat.

"He 's got lots of pace, too."

"I 'm sure he has, sir."

"And they tell me you can't beat him at jumping."

"They can mostly do that, sir, if they 're well handled."

"You see he 's a deal over my weight."

"Yes, he is, Mr. Vavasor. He is a fourteen stoner."

"Or fifteen," said Vavasor.

"Perhaps he may, sir. There 's no knowing what a 'orse can carry till he 's tried."

George asked his groom no more questions, but felt sure that he had better sell his brown horse if he could. Now I here protest that there was nothing specially amiss with the brown horse. Towards the end of the preceding season he had overreached himself and had been lame, and had been sold by some owner with more money than brains who had not cared to wait for a cure. Then there had gone with him a bad character, and a vague suspicion had attached itself to him, as there does to hundreds of horses which are very good animals in their way. He had come thus to Tattersall's, and Vavasor had bought him cheap, thinking that he might make money of him, from his form and action. He had found nothing amiss with him,—nor, indeed, had Bat Smithers. But his character went with him, and therefore Bat Smithers

thought it well to be knowing. George Vavasor knew as much of horses as most men can,—as, perhaps, as any man can who is not a dealer, or a veterinary surgeon; but he, like all men, doubted his own knowledge, though on that subject he would never admit that he doubted it. Therefore he took Bat's word and felt sure that the horse was wrong.

"We shall have a run from the big wood," said George.

"If they make un break, you will, sir," said Bat.

"At any rate, I 'll ride the brown horse," said George. Then, as soon as that was settled between them, the Roebury Club overtook them.

There was now a rush of horses on the road together, and they were within a quarter of a mile of Edgehill church, close to which was the meet. Bat with his two hunters fell a little behind, and the others trotted on together. The other grooms with their animals were on in advance, and were by this time employed in combing out forelocks, and rubbing stirrup leathers and horses' legs free from the dirt of the roads;—but Bat Smithers was like his master, and did not congregate much with other men, and Vavasor was sure to give orders to his servant different from the orders given by others.

"Are you well mounted this year?" Maxwell asked of George Vavasor.

"No, indeed; I never was what I call well mounted yet. I generally have one horse and three or four cripples. That brown horse behind there is pretty good, I believe."

"I see your man has got the old chestnut mare with him."

"She 's one of the cripples,—not but what she 's as sound as a bell, and as good a hunter as ever I wish to ride; but she makes a little noise when she 's going."

"So that you can hear her three fields off," said Grindley.

"Five, if the fields are small enough and your ears are sharp enough," said Vavasor. "All the same I would n't change her for the best horse I ever saw under you."

"Had you there, Grindems," said Maxwell.

"No, he did n't," said Grindley. "He did n't have me at all."

"Your horses, Grindley, are always up to all the work they have to do," said George; "and I don't know what any man wants more than that."

"Had you again, Grindems," said Maxwell.

"I can ride against him any day," said Grindley.

"Yes; or against a brick wall either, if your horse did n't know any better," said George.

"Had you again, Grindems," said Maxwell. Whereupon Mr. Grindley trotted on, round the corner by the church, and into the field in which the hounds were assembled. The fire had become too hot for him, and he thought it best to escape. Had it been Vavasor alone he would have turned upon him and snarled, but he could not afford to exhibit any ill temper to the king of the club. Mr. Grindley was not popular, and were Maxwell to turn openly against him his sporting life down at Roebury would decidedly be a failure.

The lives of such men as Mr. Grindley,—men who are tolerated in the daily society of others who are ac-

counted their superiors, do not seem to have many attractions. And yet how many such men does one see in almost every set! Why Mr. Grindley should have been inferior to Mr. Maxwell the banker, or to Stone or to Prettyman, who were brewers, or even to Mr. Pollock, the heavy-weight literary gentleman, I can hardly say. An attorney by his trade is at any rate as good as a brewer, and there are many attorneys who hold their heads high anywhere. Grindley was a rich man,—or at any rate rich enough for the life he led. I don't know much about his birth, but I believe it was as good as Maxwell's. He was not ignorant, or a fool;—whereas I rather think Maxwell was a fool. Grindley had made his own way in the world, but Maxwell would certainly not have made himself a banker if his father had not been a banker before him; nor could the bank have gone on and prospered had there not been partners there who were better men of business than our friend. Grindley knew that he had a better intellect than Maxwell; and yet he allowed Maxwell to snub him, and he toadied Maxwell in return. It was not on the score of riding that Maxwell claimed and held his superiority, for Grindley did not want pluck, and every one knew that Maxwell had lived freely and that his nerves were not what they had been. I think it had come from the outward look of the men, from the form of each, from the gait and visage, which in one was good and in the other insignificant. The nature of such dominion of man over man is very singular, but this is certain, that when once obtained in manhood it may be easily held.

Among boys at school the same thing is even more conspicuous, because boys have less of conscience

than men, are more addicted to tyranny, and when weak are less prone to feel the misery and disgrace of succumbing. Who has been through a large school and does not remember the Maxwells and Grindleys, —the tyrants and the slaves,—those who domineered and those who submitted? Nor was it, even then, personal strength, nor always superior courage, that gave the power of command. Nor was it intellect, or thoughtfulness, nor by any means such qualities as make men and boys lovable. It is said by many who have had to deal with boys, that certain among them claim and obtain ascendancy by the spirit within them; but I doubt whether the ascendancy is not rather thrust on them than claimed by them. Here again I think the outward gait of the boy goes far towards obtaining for him the submission of his fellows.

But the tyrant boy does not become the tyrant man, or the slave boy the slave man, because the outward visage, that has been noble or mean in the one, changes and becomes so often mean or noble in the other.

"By George, there 's Pollock!" said Maxwell, as he rode into the field by the church. "I 'll bet half a crown that he 's come down from London this morning, that he was up all night last night, and that he tells us so three times before the hounds go out of the paddock." Mr. Pollock was the heavy-weight sporting literary gentleman.

CHAPTER XVII.

EDGEHILL.

Of all sights in the world there is, I think, none more beautiful than that of a pack of fox-hounds seated, on a winter morning, round the huntsmen, if the place of meeting has been chosen with anything of artistic skill. It should be in a grassy field, and the field should be small. It should not be absolutely away from all buildings, and the hedgerows should not have been clipped and pared, and made straight with reference to modern agricultural economy. There should be trees near, and the ground should be a little uneven, so as to mark some certain small space as the exact spot where the dogs and servants of the hunt should congregate.

There are well-known grand meets in England, in the parks of noblemen, before their houses, or even on what are called their lawns; but these magnificent affairs have but little of the beauty of which I speak. Such assemblies are too grand and too ornate, and, moreover, much too far removed from true sporting proprieties. At them, equipages are shining, and ladies' dresses are gorgeous, and crowds of tradesmen from the neighbouring town have come there to look at the grand folk. To my eye there is nothing beautiful in that. The meet I speak of is arranged with a

view to sport, but the accident of the locality may make it the prettiest thing in the world.

Such, in a special degree, was the case at Edgehill. At Edgehill the whole village consisted of three or four cottages; but there was a small old church, with an old grey tower, and a narrow, green, almost dark, churchyard, surrounded by elm-trees. The road from Roebury to the meet passed by the church stile, and turning just beyond it came upon the gate which led into the little field in which the hounds felt themselves as much at home as in their kennels. There might be six or seven acres in the field, which was long and narrow, so that the huntsman had space to walk leisurely up and down with the pack clustering round him, when he considered that longer sitting might chill them. The church tower was close at hand, visible through the trees, and the field itself was green and soft, though never splashing with mud or heavy with holes.

Edgehill was a favourite meet in that country, partly because foxes were very abundant in the great wood adjacent, partly because the whole country around is grass-land, and partly, no doubt, from the sporting propensities of the neighbouring population. As regards my own taste, I do not know that I do like beginning a day with a great wood,—and if not beginning it, certainly not ending it. It is hard to come upon the cream of hunting, as it is upon the cream of any other delight. Who can always drink Lafitte of the finest, can always talk to a woman who is both beautiful and witty, or can always find the right spirit in the poetry he reads? A man has usually to work through much mud before he gets his nugget. It is so certainly in

hunting, and a big wood too frequently afflicts the sportsman, as the mud does the miner. The small gorse cover is the happy, much-envied bit of ground in which the gold is sure to show itself readily. But without the woods the gorse would not hold the foxes, and without the mud the gold would not have found its resting-place.

But, as I have said, Edgehill was a popular meet, and, as regarded the meet itself, was eminently picturesque. On the present occasion the little field was full of horsemen, moving about slowly, chatting together, smoking cigars, getting off from their hacks and mounting their hunters, giving orders to their servants, and preparing for the day. There were old country gentlemen there, greeting each other from far sides of the county; sporting farmers who love to find themselves alongside their landlords, and to feel that the pleasures of the country are common to both; men down from town, like our friends of the Roebury Club, who made hunting their chosen pleasure, and who formed, in number, perhaps the largest portion of the field; officers from garrisons round about; a cloud of servants, and a few nondescript stragglers who had picked up horses, hither and thither, round the country. Outside the gate on the road were drawn up a variety of vehicles, open carriages, dog-carts, gigs, and waggonettes, in some few of which were seated ladies who had come over to see the meet. But Edgehill was, essentially, not a ladies' meet. The distances to it were long, and the rides in Cranby Wood—the big wood—were not adapted for wheels. There were one or two ladies on horseback, as is always the case; but Edgehill was not a place popular, even with hunting

ladies. One carriage, that of the old master of the hounds, had entered the sacred precincts of the field, and from this the old baronet was just descending, as Maxwell, Calder Jones, and Vavasor rode into the field.

"I hope I see you well, Sir William," said Maxwell, greeting the master. Calder Jones also made his little speech, and so did Vavasor.

"Humph—well, yes, I 'm pretty well, thank 'ee. Just move on, will you? My mare can't stir here." Then some one else spoke to him, and he only grunted in answer. Having slowly been assisted up on to his horse,—for he was over seventy years of age,—he trotted off to the hounds, while all the farmers round him touched their hats to him. But his mind was laden with affairs of import, and he noticed no one. In a whispered voice he gave his instructions to his huntsman, who said, "Yes, Sir William," "No, Sir William," "No doubt, Sir William." One long-eared, long-legged fellow, in a hunting-cap and scarlet coat, hung listening by, anxious to catch something of the orders for the morning. "Who the devil 's that fellow, that 's all breeches and boots?" said Sir William aloud to some one near him, as the huntsman moved off with the hounds. Sir William knew the man well enough, but was minded to punish him for his discourtesy. "Where shall we find first, Sir William?" said Calder Jones, in a voice that was really very humble. "How the mischief am I to know where the foxes are?" said Sir William, with an oath; and Calder Jones retired unhappy, and for the moment altogether silenced.

And yet Sir William was the most popular man in

the county, and no more courteous gentleman ever sat at the bottom of his own table. A mild man he was, too, when out of his saddle, and one by no means disposed to assume special supremacy. But a master of hounds, if he have long held the country,—and Sir William had held his for more than thirty years,—obtains a power which that of no other potentate can equal. He may say and do what he pleases, and his tyranny is always respected. No conspiracy against him has a chance of success; no sedition will meet with sympathy;—that is, if he be successful in showing sport. If a man be sworn at, abused, and put down without cause, let him bear it and think that he has been a victim for the public good. And let him never be angry with the master. That rough tongue is the necessity of the master's position. They used to say that no captain could manage a ship without swearing at his men. But what are the captain's troubles in comparison with those of the master of hounds? The captain's men are under discipline, and can be locked up, flogged, or have their grog stopped. The master of hounds cannot stop the grog of any offender, and he can only stop the tongue, or horse, of such an one by very sharp words.

"Well, Pollock, when did you come?" said Maxwell.

"By George," said the literary gentleman, "just down from London by the 8.30 from Euston Square, and got over here from Winslow in a trap, with two fellows I never saw in my life before. We came tandem in a fly, and did the nineteen miles in an hour."

"Come, Athenian, draw it mild," said Maxwell.

"We did, indeed. I wonder whether they 'll pay me their share of the fly. I had to leave Onslow Crescent at a quarter before eight, and I did three hours' work before I started."

"Then you did it by candle-light," said Grindley.

"Of course I did; and why should n't I? Do you suppose no one can work by candle-light except a lawyer? I suppose you fellows were playing whist, and drinking hard. I 'm uncommon glad I was n't with you, for I shall be able to ride."

"I bet you a pound," said Jones, "if there 's a run, I see more of it than you."

"I 'll take that bet with Jones," said Grindley, "and Vavasor shall be the judge."

"Gentlemen, the hounds can't get out, if you will stop up the gate," said Sir William. Then the pack passed through, and they all trotted on for four miles, to Cranby Wood.

Vavasor, as he rode on to the wood, was alone, or speaking, from time to time, a few words to his servant. "I 'll ride the chestnut mare in the wood," he said, "and do you keep near me."

"I bean't to be galloping up and down them rides, I suppose," said Bat, almost contemptuously.

"I shan't gallop up and down the rides, myself; but do you mark me, to know where I am, so that I can change if a fox should go away."

"You 'll be here all day, sir. That 's my belief."

"If so, I won't ride the brown horse at all. But do you take care to let me have him if there 's a chance. Do you understand?"

"Oh yes, I understand, sir. There ain't no difficulty in my understanding;—only I don't think, sir,

you 'll ever get a fox out of that wood to-day. Why, it stands to reason. The wind 's from the northeast."

Cranby Wood is very large,—there being, in truth, two or three woods together. It was nearly twelve before they found; and then for an hour there was great excitement among the men, who rode up and down the rides, as the hounds drove the fox from one end to another of the enclosure. Once or twice the poor animal did try to go away, and then there was great hallooing, galloping, and jumping over unnecessary fences; but he was headed back again, or changed his mind, not liking the northeast wind of which Bat Smithers had predicted such bad things. After one the crowd of men became rather more indifferent, and clustered together in broad spots, eating their lunch, smoking cigars, and chaffing each other. It was singular to observe the amazing quantity of ham sandwiches and of sherry that had been carried into Cranby Wood on that day. Grooms appeared to have been laden with cases, and men were as well armed with flasks at their saddle-bows as they used to be with pistols. Maxwell and Pollock formed the centre of one of these crowds, and chaffed each other with the utmost industry, till, tired of having inflicted no wounds, they turned upon Grindley and drove him out of the circle. "You 'll make that man cut his throat, if you go on at that," said Pollock. "Shall I?" said Maxwell. "Then I 'll certainly stick to him for the sake of humanity in general." During all this time Vavasor sat apart, quite alone, and Bat Smithers grimly kept his place, about three hundred yards from him.

"We shan't do any good to-day," said Grindley, coming up to Vavasor.

"I 'm sure I don't know," said Vavasor.

"That old fellow has got to be so stupid, he does n't know what he 's about," said Grindley, meaning Sir William.

"How can he make the fox break?" said Vavasor; and as his voice was by no means encouraging Grindley rode away.

Lunch and cigars lasted till two, during which hour the hounds, the huntsmen, the whips, and old Sir William were hard at work, as also were some few others who persistently followed every chance of the game. From that till three there were two or three flashes in the pan, and false reports as to foxes which had gone away, which first set men galloping, and then made them very angry. After three, men began to say naughty things, to abuse Cranby Wood, to wish violently that they had remained at home or gone elsewhere, and to speak irreverently of their ancient master. "It 's the cussedest place in all creation," said Maxwell. "I often said I 'd not come here any more, and now I say it again."

"And yet you 'll be here the next meet," said Grindley, who had sneaked back to his old companions in weariness of spirit.

"Grindems, you know a sight too much," said Maxwell; "you do indeed. An ordinary fellow has no chance with you."

Grindley was again going to catch it, but was on this time saved by the appearance of the huntsman, who came galloping up one of the rides, with a lot of the hounds at his heels.

"He is n't away, Tom, surely?" said Maxwell.

"He 's out of the wood somewheres," said Tom;—

and off they all went. Vavasor changed his horse, getting on to the brown one, and giving up his chestnut mare to Bat Smithers, who suggested that he might as well go home to Roebury now. Vavasor gave him no answer, but, trotting on to the point where the rides met, stopped a moment and listened carefully. Then he took a path diverging away from that by which the huntsmen and the crowd of horsemen had gone, and made the best of his way through the wood. At the end of this he came upon Sir William, who, with no one near him but his servant, was standing in the pathway of a little hunting-gate.

"Hold hard," said Sir William. "The hounds are not out of the wood yet."

"Is the fox away, sir?"

"What 's the good of that if we can't get the hounds out?—Yes, he 's away. He passed out where I 'm standing." And then he began to blow his horn lustily, and by degrees other men and a few hounds came down the ride. Then Tom, with his horse almost blown, made his appearance outside the wood, and soon there came a rush of men, nearly on the top of one another, pushing on, not knowing whither, but keenly alive to the fact that the fox had at last consented to move his quarters.

Tom touched his hat, and looked at his master, inquiringly. "He 's gone for Claydon's," said the master. "Try them up that hedgerow." Tom did try them up the hedgerow, and in half a minute the hounds came upon the scent. Then you might see men settling their hats on their heads, and feeling their feet in their stirrups. The moment for which they had so long waited had come, and yet there were many

who would now have preferred that the fox should be headed back into cover. Some had but little confidence in their half-blown horses;—with many the waiting, though so abused and anathematised, was in truth more to their taste than the run itself;—with others the excitement had gone by, and a gallop over a field or two was necessary before it would be restored. With most men at such a moment there is a little nervousness, some fear of making a bad start, a dread lest others should have more of the success of the hunt than falls to them. But there was a great rush and a mighty bustle as the hounds made out their game, and Sir William felt himself called upon to use the rough side of his tongue to more than one delinquent.

And then certain sly old stagers might be seen turning off to the left, instead of following the course of the game as indicated by the hounds. They were men who had felt the air as they came out, and knew that the fox must soon run down wind, whatever he might do for the first half mile or so,—men who knew also which was the shortest way to Claydon's by the road. Ah, the satisfaction that there is when these men are thrown out, and their dead knowledge proved to be of no avail! If a fox will only run straight, heading from the cover on his real line, these very sagacious gentlemen seldom come to much honour and glory.

In the present instance the beast seemed determined to go straight enough, for the hounds ran the scent along three or four hedgerows in a line. He had managed to get for himself full ten minutes' start, and had been able to leave the cover and all his enemies

well behind him before he bethought himself as to his best way to his purposed destination. And here, from field to field, there were little hunting-gates at which men crowded lustily, poking and shoving each other's horses, and hating each other with a bitterness of hatred which is, I think, known nowhere else. No hunting man ever wants to jump if he can help it, and the hedges near the gate were not alluring. A few there were who made lines for themselves, taking the next field to the right, or scrambling through the corners of the fences while the rush was going on at the gates; and among these was George Vavasor. He never rode in a crowd, always keeping himself somewhat away from men as well as hounds. He would often be thrown out, and then men would hear no more of him for that day. On such occasions he did not show himself, as other men do, twenty minutes after the fox had been killed or run to ground,—but betook himself home by himself, going through the byeways and lanes, thus leaving no report of his failure to be spoken of by his compeers.

As long as the line of gates lasted, the crowd continued as thick as ever, and the best man was he whose horse could shove the hardest. After passing some four or five fields in this way they came out upon a road, and, the scent holding strong, the dogs crossed it without any demurring. Then came doubt into the minds of men, many of whom, before they would venture away from their position on the lane, narrowly watched the leading hounds to see whether there was indication of a turn to the one side or the other. Sir William, whose seventy odd years excused him, turned sharp to the left, knowing that he could make Clay-

don's that way; and very many were the submissive horsemen who followed him; a few took the road to the right, having in their minds some little game of their own. The hardest riders there had already crossed from the road into the country, and were going well to the hounds, ignorant, some of them, of the brook before them, and others unheeding. Foremost among these was Burgo Fitzgerald,—Burgo Fitzgerald, whom no man had ever known to crane at a fence, or to hug a road, or to spare his own neck or his horse's. And yet poor Burgo seldom finished well,—coming to repeated grief in this matter of his hunting, as he did so constantly in other matters of his life.

But almost neck and neck with Burgo was Pollock, the sporting literary gentleman. Pollock had but two horses to his stud, and was never known to give much money for them;—and he weighed without his boots fifteen stone! No one ever knew how Pollock did it;—more especially as all the world declared that he was as ignorant of hunting as any tailor. He could ride, or when he could n't ride he could tumble,—men said that of him,—and he would ride as long as the beast under him could go. But few knew the sad misfortunes which poor Pollock sometimes encountered;—the muddy ditches in which he was left; the despair with which he would stand by his unfortunate horse when the poor brute could no longer move across some deep-ploughed field; the miles that he would walk at night beside a tired animal, as he made his way slowly back to Roebury!

Then came Tom the huntsman, with Calder Jones close to him, and Grindley intent on winning his sovereign. Vavasor had also crossed the road somewhat

to the left, carrying with him one or two who knew that he was a safe man to follow. Maxwell had been ignominiously turned by the hedge, which, together with its ditch, formed a fence such as all men do not love at the beginning of a run. He had turned from it, acknowledging the cause. "By George!" said he, "that 's too big for me yet awhile; and there 's no end of a river at the bottom." So he had followed the master down the road.

All those whom we have named managed to get over the brook, Pollock's horse barely contriving to get up his hind legs from the broken edge of the bank. Some nags refused it, and their riders thus lost all their chance of sport for that day. Such is the lot of men who hunt. A man pays five or six pounds for his day's amusement, and it is ten to one that the occurrences of the day disgust rather than gratify him! One or two got in, and scrambled out on the other side, but Tufto Pearlings, the Manchester man from Friday Street, stuck in the mud at the bottom, and could not get his mare out till seven men had come with ropes to help him. "Where the devil is my fellow?" Pearlings asked of the countrymen; but the countrymen could not tell him that "his fellow" with his second horse was riding the hunt with great satisfaction to himself.

George Vavasor found that his horse went with him uncommonly well, taking his fences almost in the stride of his gallop, and giving unmistakable signs of good condition. "I wonder what it is that 's amiss with him," said George to himself, resolving, however, that he would sell him that day if he got an opportunity. Straight went the line of the fox, up from the

brook, and Tom began to say that his master had been wrong about Claydon's.

"Where are we now?" said Burgo, as four or five of them dashed through the open gate of a farmyard.

"This is Bulby's farm," said Tom, "and we 're going right away for Elmham Wood."

"Elmham Wood be d——," said a stout farmer, who had come as far as that with them. "You won't see Elmham Wood to-day."

"I suppose you know best," said Tom; and then they were through the yard, across another road, and down a steep ravine by the side of a little copse. "He 's been through them firs, any way," said Tom. "To him, Gaylass!" Then up they went the other side of the ravine, and saw the body of the hounds almost a field before them at the top.

"I say,—that took some of the wind out of a fellow," said Pollock.

"You must n't mind about wind now," said Burgo, dashing on.

"Was n't the pace awful, coming up to that farmhouse?" said Calder Jones, looking round to see if Grindley was shaken off. But Grindley, with some six or seven others, was still there. And there, also, always in the next field to the left, was George Vavasor. He had spoken no word to any one since the hunt commenced, nor had he wished to speak to any one. He desired to sell his horse,—and he desired also to succeed in the run for other reasons than that, though I think he would have found it difficult to define them.

Now they had open grass land for about a mile, but with very heavy fences,—so that the hounds gained upon them a little, and Pollock's weight began to tell.

The huntsman and Burgo were leading with some fortunate country gentleman, whose good stars had brought him in upon them at the farmyard gate. It is the injustice of such accidents as this that breaks the heart of a man who has honestly gone through all the heat and work of the struggle! And the hounds had veered a little round to the left, making, after all, for Claydon's. "Darned if the Squire war n't right," said Tom. Sir William, though a baronet, was familiarly called the Squire throughout the hunt.

"We ain't going for Claydon's now?" asked Burgo.

"Them 's Claydon beeches we sees over there," said Tom. "'Tain't often the Squire 's wrong."

Here they came to a little double rail and a little quick-set hedge. A double rail is a nasty fence always if it has been made any way strong, and one which a man with a wife and a family is justified in avoiding. They mostly can be avoided, having gates; and this could have been avoided. But Burgo never avoided anything, and went over it beautifully. The difficulty is to be discreet when the man before one has been indiscreet. Tom went for the gate, as did Pollock, who knew that he could have no chance at the double rails. But Calder Jones came to infinite grief, striking the top bar of the second rail, and going head-foremost out of his saddle, as though thrown by a catapult. There we must leave him. Grindley, rejoicing greatly at this discomfiture, made for the gate; but the country gentleman with the fresh horse accomplished the rails, and was soon alongside of Burgo.

"I did n't see you at the start," said Burgo.

"And I did n't see you," said the country gentleman; "so it 's even."

Burgo did not see the thing in the same light, but he said no more. Grindley and Tom were soon after them, Tom doing his utmost to shake off the attorney. Pollock was coming on also; but the pace had been too much for him, and though the ground rode light his poor beast laboured and grunted sorely. The hounds were still veering somewhat to the left, and Burgo, jumping over a small fence into the same field with them, saw that there was a horseman ahead of him. This was George Vavasor, who was going well, without any symptom of distress.

And now they were at Claydon's, having run over some seven miles of ground in about thirty-five minutes. To those who do not know what hunting is, this pace does not seem very extraordinary; but it had been quite quick enough, as was testified by the horses which had gone the distance. Our party entered Claydon's Park at back, through a gate in the park palings that was open on hunting days; but a much more numerous lot was there almost as soon as them, who had come in by the main entrance. This lot was headed by Sir William, and our friend Maxwell was with him.

"A jolly thing so far," said Burgo to Maxwell; "about the best we 've had this year."

"I did n't see a yard of it," said Maxwell. "I had n't nerve to get off the first road, and I have n't been off it ever since." Maxwell was a man who never lied about his hunting, or had the slightest shame in riding roads. "Who 's been with you?" said he.

"There 've been Tom and I;—and Calder Jones was there for a while. I think he killed himself somewhere. And there was Pollock, and your friend

Grindley, and a chap whose name I don't know, who dropped out of heaven about half-way in the run; and there was another man whose back I saw just now; there he is,—by heavens, it 's Vavasor! I did n't know he was here."

They hung about the Claydon covers for ten minutes, and then their fox went off again,—their fox or another, as to which there was a great discussion afterwards; but he who would have suggested the idea of a new fox to Sir William would have been a bold man. A fox, however, went off, turning still to the left from Claydon's towards Roebury. Those ten minutes had brought up some fifty men; but it did not bring up Calder Jones nor Tufto Pearlings, nor some half-dozen others who had already come to serious misfortune; but Grindley was there, very triumphant in his own success, and already talking of Jones's sovereign. And Pollock was there also, thankful for that ten minutes' law, and trusting that wind might be given to his horse to finish the run triumphantly.

But the pace on leaving Claydon's was better than ever. This may have come from the fact that the scent was keener, as they got out so close upon their game. But I think they must have changed their fox. Maxwell, who saw him go, swore that he was fresh and clean. Burgo said that he knew it to be the same fox, but gave no reason. "Same fox! in course it was; why should n't it be the same?" said Tom. The country gentleman who had dropped from heaven was quite sure that they had changed, and so were most of those who had ridden the road. Pollock confined himself to hoping that he might soon be

killed, and that thus his triumph for the day might be assured.

On they went, and the pace soon became too good for the poor author. His horse at last refused a little hedge, and there was not another trot to be got out of him. That night Pollock turned up at Roebury about nine o'clock, very hungry,—and it was known that his animal was alive;—but the poor horse ate not a grain of oats that night, nor on the next morning. Vavasor had again taken a line to himself, on this occasion a little to the right of the meet; but Maxwell followed him, and rode close with him to the end. Burgo for a while still led the body of the field, incurring at first much condemnation from Sir William,—nominally for hurrying on among the hounds, but in truth because he got before Sir William himself. During this latter part of the run Sir William stuck to the hounds in spite of his seventy odd years. Going down into Marham Bottom, some four or five were left behind, for they feared the soft ground near the river, and did not know the pass through it. But Sir William knew it, and those who remained close to him got over that trouble. Burgo, who would still lead, nearly foundered in the bog;—but he was light, and his horse pulled him through,—leaving a fore-shoe in the mud. After that Burgo was contented to give Sir William the lead.

Then they came up by Marham Pits to Cleshey Small Wood, which they passed without hanging there a minute, and over the grass lands of Cleshey Farm. Here Vavasor and Maxwell joined the others, having gained some three hundred yards in distance by their course, but having been forced to jump the Marham

Stream which Sir William had forded. The pace now was as good as the horses could make it,—and perhaps something better as regarded some of them. Sir William's servant had been with him, and he had got his second horse at Claydon's; Maxwell had been equally fortunate; Tom's second horse had not come up, and his beast was in great distress; Grindley had remained behind at Marham Bottom, being contented perhaps with having beaten Calder Jones,—from whom by-the-bye I may here declare that he never got his sovereign. Burgo, Vavasor, and the country gentleman still held on; but it was devoutly desired by all of them that the fox might soon come to the end of his tether. Ah! that intense longing that the fox may fail, when the failing powers of the horse begin to make themselves known,—and the consciousness comes on that all that one has done will go for nothing unless the thing can be brought to a close in a field or two! So far you have triumphed, leaving scores of men behind; but of what good is all that, if you also are to be left behind at the last?

It was manifest now to all who knew the country that the fox was making for Thornden Deer Park, but Thornden Deer Park was still two miles ahead of them, and the hounds were so near to their game that the poor beast could hardly hope to live till he got there. He had tried a well-known drain near Cleshey Farm House; but it had been inhospitably, nay cruelly, closed against him. Soon after that he threw himself down in a ditch, and the eager hounds overran him, giving him a moment's law,—and giving also a moment's law to horses that wanted it as badly. "I 'm about done for," said Burgo to Maxwell. "Luckily

for you," said Maxwell, "the fox is much in the same way."

But the fox had still more power left in him than poor Burgo Fitzgerald's horse. He gained a minute's check and then he started again, being viewed away by Sir William himself. The country gentleman of whom mention has been made also viewed him, and holloa'd as he did so: "Yoicks, tally; gone away!" The unfortunate man! "What the d—— are you roaring at?" said Sir William. "Do you suppose I don't know where the fox is?" Wherepon the country gentleman retreated, and became less conspicuous than he had been.

Away they went again, off Cleshey and into Thornden parish, on the land of Sorrell Farm,—a spot well to be remembered by one or two ever afterwards. Here Sir William made for a gate which took him a little out of the line; but Maxwell and Burgo Fitzgerald, followed by Vavasor, went straight ahead. There was a huge ditch and boundary bank there which Sir William had known and had avoided. Maxwell, whose pluck had returned to him at last, took it well. His horse was comparatively fresh and made nothing of it. Then came poor Burgo! Oh, Burgo, hadst thou not been a very child, thou shouldst have known that now, at this time of the day,—after all that thy gallant horse had done for thee,—it was impossible for thee or him. But when did Burgo Fitzgerald know anything? He rode at the bank as though it had been the first fence of the day, striking his poor beast with his spurs, as though muscle, strength, and new power could be imparted by their rowels. The animal rose at the bank, and in some

way got upon it, scrambling as he struck it with his chest, and then fell headlong into the ditch at the other side, a confused mass of head, limbs, and body. His career was at an end, and he had broken his heart! Poor noble beast, noble in vain! To his very last gasp he had done his best, and had deserved that he should have been in better hands. His master's ignorance had killed him. There are men who never know how little a horse can do,—or how much!

There was to some extent a gap in the fence when Maxwell had first ridden it and Burgo had followed him; a gap, or break in the hedge at the top, indicating plainly the place at which a horse could best get over. To this spot Vavasor followed, and was on the bank at Burgo's heels before he knew what had happened. But the man had got away and only the horse lay there in the ditch. "Are you hurt?" said Vavasor; "can I do anything?" But he did not stop. "If you can find a chap just send him to me," said Burgo in a melancholy tone. Then he sat down, with his feet in the ditch, and looked at the carcass of his horse.

There was no more need of jumping that day. The way was open into the next field,—a turnip field,—and there amidst the crisp breaking turnip-tops, with the breath of his enemies hot upon him, with their sharp teeth at his entrails, biting at them impotently in the agonies of his death struggle, poor Reynard finished his career. Maxwell was certainly the first there,—but Sir William and George Vavasor were close upon him. That taking of brushes of which we used to hear is a little out of fashion; but if such honour were due to any one it was due to Vavasor, for he and he

only had ridden the hunt throughout. But he claimed no honour, and none was specially given to him. He and Maxwell rode homewards together, having sent assistance to poor Burgo Fitzgerald; and as they went along the road, saying but little to each other, Maxwell, in a very indifferent voice, asked him a question.

"What do you want for that horse, Vavasor?"

"A hundred and fifty," said Vavasor.

"He 's mine," said Maxwell. So the brown horse was sold for about half his value, because he had brought with him a bad character.

CHAPTER XVIII.

ALICE VAVASOR'S GREAT RELATIONS.

Burgo Fitzgerald, of whose hunting experiences something has been told in the last chapter, was a young man born in the purple of the English aristocracy. He was related to half the dukes in the kingdom, and had three countesses for his aunts. When he came of age he was master of a sufficient fortune to make it quite out of the question that he should be asked to earn his bread; and though that, and other windfalls that had come to him, had long since been spent, no one had ever made to him so ridiculous a proposition as that. He was now thirty, and for some years past had been known to be much worse than penniless; but still he lived on in the same circles, still slept softly and drank of the best, and went about with his valet and his groom and his horses, and fared sumptuously every day. Some people said the countesses did it for him, and some said that it was the dukes;—while others, again, declared that the Jews were his most generous friends. At any rate he still seemed to live as he had always lived, setting tradesmen at defiance, and laughing to scorn all the rules which regulate the lives of other men.

About eighteen months before the time of which I am now speaking, a great chance had come in this young man's way, and he had almost succeeded in

making himself one of the richest men in England. There had been then a great heiress in the land, on whom the properties of half-a-dozen ancient families had concentrated; and Burgo, who in spite of his iniquities still kept his position in the drawing-rooms of the great, had almost succeeded in obtaining the hand and the wealth,—as people still said that he had obtained the heart,—of the Lady Glencora M'Cluskie. But sundry mighty magnates, driven almost to despair at the prospect of such a sacrifice, had sagaciously put their heads together, and the result had been that the Lady Glencora had heard reason. She had listened, —with many haughty tossings indeed of her proud little head, with many throbbings of her passionate young heart; but in the end she listened and heard reason. She saw Burgo for the last time, and told him that she was the promised bride of Plantagenet Palliser, nephew and heir of the Duke of Omnium.

He had borne it like a man,—never having groaned openly, or quivered once before any comrade at the name of the Lady Glencora. She had married Mr. Palliser at St. George's Square, and on the morning of her marriage he had hung about his club door in Pall Mall, listening to the bells, and saying a word or two about the wedding, with admirable courage. It had been for him a great chance,—and he had lost it. Who can say, too, that his only regret was for the money? He had spoken once of it to a married sister of his, in whose house he had first met Lady Glencora. "I shall never marry now,—that is all," he said—and then he went about, living his old reckless life, with the same recklessness as ever. He was one of those young men with dark hair and blue eyes,—who wear

no beard, and are certainly among the handsomest of all God's creatures. No more handsome man than Burgo Fitzgerald lived in his days; and this merit at any rate was his,—that he thought nothing of his own beauty. But he lived ever without conscience, without purpose,—with no idea that it behoved him as a man to do anything but eat and drink,—or ride well to hounds till some poor brute, much nobler than himself, perished beneath him.

He chiefly concerns our story at this present time because the Lady Glencora, who had loved him,—and would have married him had not those sagacious heads prevented it,—was a cousin of Alice Vavasor's. She was among those very great relations with whom Alice was connected by her mother's side,—being indeed so near to Lady Macleod, that she was first cousin to that lady, only once removed. Lady Midlothian was aunt to the Lady Glencora, and our Alice might have called cousins, and not been forbidden, with the old Lord of the Isles, Lady Glencora's father,—who was dead, however, some time previous to that affair with Burgo,—and with the Marquis of Auld Reekie, who was Lady Glencora's uncle, and had been her guardian. But Alice had kept herself aloof from her grand relations on her mother's side, choosing rather to hold herself as belonging to those who were her father's kindred. With Lady Glencora, however, she had for a short time,—for some week or ten days,—been on terms of almost affectionate intimacy. It had been then, when the wayward heiress with the bright waving locks had been most strongly minded to give herself and her wealth to Burgo Fitzgerald. Burgo had had money dealings with George

Vavasor, and knew him,—knew him intimately, and had learned the fact of this cousinship between the heiress and his friend's cousin. Whereupon in the agony of those weeks in which the sagacious heads were resisting her love, Lady Glencora came to her cousin in Queen Anne Street, and told Alice all that tale. "Was Alice," she asked, "afraid of the marquises and the countesses, or of all the rank and all the money which they boasted?" Alice answered that she was not at all afraid of them. "Then would she permit Lady Glencora and Burgo to see each other in the drawing-room at Queen Anne Street, just once?" Just once,—so that they might arrange that little plan of an elopement. But Alice could not do that for her newly found cousin. She endeavoured to explain that it was not the dignity of the sagacious heads which stood in her way, but her woman's feeling of what was right and wrong in such a matter.

"Why should I not marry him?" said Lady Glencora, with her eyes flashing. "He is my equal."

Alice explained that she had no word to say against such a marriage. She counselled her cousin to be true to her love if her love was in itself true. But she, an unmarried woman, who had hitherto not known her cousin, might not give such help as that! "If you will not help me, I am helpless!" said the Lady Glencora, and then she kneeled at Alice's knees and threw her wavy locks abroad on Alice's lap. "How shall I bribe you?" said Lady Glencora. "Next to him I will love you better than all the world." But Alice, though she kissed the fair forehead and owned that such reward would be worth much to her, could not take any bribe for such a cause. Then Lady

Glencora had been angry with her, calling her heartless, and threatening her that she too might have sorrow of her own and want assistance. Alice told nothing of her own tale,—how she had loved her cousin and had been forced to give him up, but said what kind words she could, and she of the waving hair and light blue eyes had been pacified. Then she had come again,—had come daily while the sagacious heads were at work,—and Alice in her trouble had been a comfort to her.

But the sagacious heads were victorious, as we know, and Lady Glencora M'Cluskie became Lady Glencora Palliser with all the propriety in the world, instead of becoming wife to poor Burgo, with all imaginable impropriety. And then she wrote a letter to Alice, very short and rather sad; but still with a certain sweetness in it. "She had been counselled that it was not fitting for her to love as she had thought to love, and she had resolved to give up her dream. Her cousin Alice, she knew, would respect her secret. She was going to become the wife of the best man, she thought, in all the world; and it should be the one care of her life to make him happy." She said not a word in all her letter of loving this newly found lord. "She was to be married at once. Would Alice be one among the bevy of bridesmaids who were to grace the ceremony?"

Alice wished her joy heartily,—"heartily," she said, but had declined that office of bridesmaid. She did not wish to undergo the cold looks of the Lady Julias and Lady Janes who all would know each other, but none of whom would know her. So she sent her cousin a little ring, and asked her to keep it amidst all

that wealthy tribute of marriage gifts which would be poured forth at her feet.

From that time to this present Alice had heard no more of Lady Glencora. She had been married late in the preceding season and had gone away with Mr. Palliser, spending her honeymoon amidst the softness of some Italian lake. They had not returned to England till the time had come for them to encounter the magnificent Christmas festivities of Mr. Palliser's uncle, the duke. On this occasion Gatherum Castle, the vast palace which the duke had built at a cost of nearly a quarter of a million, was opened, as it had never been opened before;—for the duke's heir had married to the duke's liking, and the duke was a man who could do such things handsomely when he was well pleased. Then there had been a throng of bridal guests, and a succession of bridal gaieties which had continued themselves even past the time at which Mr. Palliser was due at Westminster;—and Mr. Palliser was a legislator who served his country with the utmost assiduity. So the London season commenced, progressed, and was consumed; and still Alice heard nothing more of her friend and cousin Lady Glencora.

But this had troubled her not at all. A chance circumstance, the story of which she had told to no one, had given her a short intimacy with this fair child of the gold mines, but she had felt that they two could not live together in habits of much intimacy. She had, when thinking of the young bride, only thought of that wild love episode in the girl's life. It had been strange to her that she should in one week have listened to the most passionate protestations from her friend of love for one man, and then have been told

in the next that another man was to be her friend's husband! But she reflected that her own career was much the same,—only with the interval of some longer time.

But her own career was not the same. Glencora had married Mr. Palliser,—had married him without pausing to doubt;—but Alice had gone on doubting till at last she had resolved that she would not marry Mr. Grey. She thought of this much in those days at Cheltenham, and wondered often whether Glencora lived with her husband in the full happiness of conjugal love.

One morning, about three days after Mr. Grey's visit, there came to her two letters, as to neither of which did she know the writer by the handwriting. Lady Macleod had told her,—with some hesitation, indeed, for Lady Macleod was afraid of her,—but had told her, nevertheless, more than once, that those noble relatives had heard of the treatment to which Mr. Grey was being subjected, and had expressed their great sorrow,—if not dismay or almost anger. Lady Macleod, indeed, had gone as far as she dared, and might have gone further without any sacrifice of truth. Lady Midlothian had said that it would be disgraceful to the family, and Lady Glencora's aunt, the Marchioness of Auld Reekie, had demanded to be told what it was the girl wanted.

When the letters came Lady Macleod was not present, and I am disposed to think that one of them had been written by concerted arrangement with her. But if so she had not dared to watch the immediate effect of her own projectile. This one was from Lady Midlothian. Of the other Lady Macleod certainly knew nothing, though it also had sprung out of the

discussions which had taken place as to Alice's sins in the Auld Reekie-Midlothian set. This other letter was from Lady Glencora. Alice opened the two, one without reading the other, very slowly. Lady Midlothian's was the first opened, and then came a spot of anger on Alice's cheeks as she saw the signature, and caught a word or two as she allowed her eye to glance down the page. Then she opened the other, which was shorter, and when she saw her cousin's signature, "Glencora Palliser," she read that letter first,—read it twice before she went back to the disagreeable task of perusing Lady Midlothian's lecture. The reader shall have both the letters, but that from the Countess shall have precedence.

"Castle-Reekie, N. B.,
"October 186—.

"My dear Miss Vavasor,—I have not the pleasure of knowing you personally, though I have heard of you very often from our dear mutual friend and relative Lady Macleod, with whom I understand that you are at present on a visit. Your grandmother,—by the mother's side,—Lady Flora Macleod, and my mother the Countess of Leith, were half-sisters; and though circumstances since that have prevented our seeing so much of each other as is desirable, I have always remembered the connection, and have ever regarded you as one in whose welfare I am bound by ties of blood to take a warm interest."

("'Since that!'—what does she mean by 'since that'?" said Alice to herself. "She has never set eyes on me at all. Why does she talk of not having seen as much of me as is desirable?")

"I had learned with great gratification that you

were going to be married to a most worthy gentleman, Mr. John Grey of Nethercoats, in Cambridgeshire. When I first heard this I made it my business to institute some inquiries, and I was heartily glad to find that your choice had done you so much credit." (If the reader has read Alice's character as I have meant it should be read, it will thoroughly be understood that this was wormwood to her.) "I was informed that Mr. Grey is in every respect a gentleman,—that he is a man of most excellent habits, and one to whom any young woman could commit her future happiness with security, that his means are very good for his position, and that there was no possible objection to such a marriage. All this gave great satisfaction to me, in which I was joined by the Marchioness of Auld Reekie, who is connected with you almost as nearly as I am, and who, I can assure you, feels a considerable interest in your welfare. I am staying with her now, and in all that I say, she agrees with me.

"You may feel then how dreadfully we were dismayed when we were told by dear Lady Macleod that you had told Mr. Grey that you intended to change your mind! My dear Miss Vavasor, can this be true? There are things in which a young lady has no right to change her mind after it has been once made up; and certainly when a young lady has accepted a gentleman, that is one of them. He cannot legally make you become his wife, but he has a right to claim you before God and man. Have you considered that he has probably furnished his house in consequence of his intended marriage,—and perhaps in compliance with your own especial wishes?" (I think that Lady Macleod must have told the Countess

something that she had heard about the garden.)

"Have you reflected that he has of course told all his friends? Have you any reason to give? I am told, none! Nothing should ever be done without a reason; much less such a thing as this in which your own interests and, I may say, respectability are involved. I hope you will think of this before you persist in destroying your own happiness and perhaps that of a very worthy man.

"I had heard, some years ago, when you were much younger, that you had become imprudently attached in another direction—with a gentleman with none of those qualities to recommend him which speak so highly for Mr. Grey. It would grieve me very much, as it would also the Marchioness, who in this matter thinks exactly as I do, if I were led to suppose that your rejection of Mr. Grey had been caused by *any renewal of that project.* Nothing, my dear Miss Vavasor, could be more unfortunate,—and I might almost add a stronger word.

"I have been advised that a line from me as representing your poor mother's family, especially as I have at the present moment the opportunity of expressing Lady Auld Reekie's sentiments as well as my own, might be of service. I implore you, my dear Miss Vavasor, to remember what you owe to God and man, and to carry out an engagement made by yourself, that is in all respects comme il faut, and which will give entire satisfaction to your friends and relatives.

"If you do this you will always find me to be your sincere friend,

"MARGARET M. MIDLOTHIAN."

I think that Lady Macleod had been wrong in supposing that this could do any good. She should have known Alice better; and should also have known the world better. But her own reverence for her own noble relatives was so great that she could not understand, even yet, that all such feeling was wanting to her niece. It was to her impossible that the expressed opinion of such an one as the Countess of Midlothian, owning her relationship and solicitude, and condescending at the same time to express friendship,—she could not, I say, understand that the voice of such an one, so speaking, should have no weight whatever. But I think that she had been quite right in keeping out of Alice's way at the moment of the arrival of the letter. Alice read it, slowly, and then replacing it in its envelope, leaned back quietly in her chair,—with her eyes fixed upon the teapot on the table. She had, however, the other letter on which to occupy her mind, and thus relieve her from the effects of too deep an animosity against the Countess.

The Lady Glencora's letter was as follows:

"Matching Priory,
"Thursday.

"Dear Cousin,—I have just come home from Scotland, where they have been telling me something of your little troubles. I had little troubles once too, and you were so good to me! Will you come to us here for a few weeks? We shall be here till Christmas-time, when we go somewhere else. I have told my husband that you are a great friend of mine as well as a cousin, and that he must be good to you. He is very quiet, and works very hard at politics; but

I think you will like him. Do come! There will be a good many people here, so that you will not find it dull. If you will name the day we will send the carriage for you to Matching Station, and I dare say I can manage to come myself.

"Yours affectionately,

"G. PALLISER.

"P. S.—I know what will be in your mind. You will say, why did not she come to me in London? She knew the way to Queen Anne Street well enough. Dear Alice, don't say that. Believe me, I had much to do and think of in London. And if I was wrong, yet you will forgive me. Mr. Palliser says I am to give you his love,—as being a cousin,—and say that you must come!"

This letter was certainly better than the other, but Alice, on reading it, came to a resolve that she would not accept the invitation. In the first place, even that allusion to her little troubles jarred upon her feelings; and then she thought that her rejection of Mr. Grey could be no special reason why she should go to Matching Priory. Was it not very possible that she had been invited that she might meet Lady Midlothian there, and encounter all the strength of a personal battery from the Countess? Lady Glencora's letter she would of course answer, but to Lady Midlothian she would not condescend to make any reply whatever.

About eleven o'clock Lady Macleod came down to her. For half an hour or so Alice said nothing; nor did Lady Macleod ask any question. She looked in-

quisitively at Alice, eying the letter which was lying by the side of her niece's workbasket, but she said no word about Mr. Grey or the Countess. At last Alice spoke.

"Aunt," she said, "I have had a letter this morning from your friend, Lady Midlothian."

"She is my cousin, Alice; and yours as much as mine."

"Your cousin then, aunt. But it is of more moment that she is your friend. She certainly is not mine, nor can her cousinship afford any justification for her interfering in my affairs."

"Alice,—from her position——"

"Her position can be nothing to me, aunt. I will not submit to it. There is her letter, which you can read if you please. After that you may burn it. I need hardly say that I shall not answer it."

"And what am I to say to her, Alice?"

"Nothing from me, aunt;—from yourself, whatever you please, of course." Then there was silence between them for a few minutes. "And I have had another letter, from Lady Glencora, who married Mr. Palliser, and whom I knew in London last spring."

"And has that offended you, too?"

"No, there is no offence in that. She asks me to go and see her at Matching Priory, her husband's house; but I shall not go."

But at last Alice agreed to pay this visit, and it may be as well to explain here how she was brought to do so. She wrote to Lady Glencora, declining, and explaining frankly that she did decline, because she thought it probable that she might there meet Lady Midlothian. Lady Midlothian, she said, had inter-

fered very unwarrantably in her affairs, and she did not wish to make her acquaintance. To this Lady Glencora replied, post haste, that she had intended no such horrid treachery as that for Alice; that neither would Lady Midlothian be there, nor any of that set; by which Alice knew that Lady Glencora referred specially to her aunt the Marchioness; that no one would be at Matching who could torment Alice, either with right or without it, "except so far as I myself may do," Lady Glencora said; and then she named an early day in November, at which she would herself undertake to meet Alice at the Matching Station. On receipt of this letter, Alice, after two days' doubt, accepted the invitation.

CHAPTER XIX.

TRIBUTE FROM OILYMEAD.

Kate Vavasor, in writing to her cousin Alice, felt some little difficulty in excusing herself for remaining in Norfolk with Mrs. Greenow. She had laughed at Mrs. Greenow before she went to Yarmouth, and had laughed at herself for going there. And in all her letters since she had spoken of her aunt as a silly, vain, worldly woman, weeping crocodile tears for an old husband whose death had released her from the tedium of his company, and spreading lures to catch new lovers. But yet she agreed to stay with her aunt, and remain with her in lodgings at Norwich for a month.

But Mrs. Greenow had about her something more than Kate had acknowledged when she first attempted to read her aunt's character. She was clever, and in her own way persuasive. She was very generous, and possessed a certain power of making herself pleasant to those around her. In asking Kate to stay with her she had so asked as to make it appear that Kate was to confer the favour. She had told her niece that she was all alone in the world. "I have money," she had said, with more appearance of true feeling than Kate had observed before. "I have money, but I have nothing else in the world. I have no home. Why should I not remain here in Norfolk, where I know a

few people? If you 'll say that you 'll go anywhere else with me, I 'll go to any place you 'll name." Kate had believed this to be hardly true. She had felt sure that her aunt wished to remain in the neighbourhood of her sea-side admirers; but, nevertheless, she had yielded, and at the end of October the two ladies, with Jeannette, settled themselves in comfortable lodgings within the precincts of the Close at Norwich.

Mr. Greenow at this time had been dead very nearly six months, but his widow made some mistake in her dates and appeared to think that the interval had been longer. On the day of their arrival at Norwich it was evident that this error had confirmed itself in her mind. "Only think," she said, as she unpacked a little miniature of the departed one, and sat with it for a moment in her hands, as she pressed her handkerchief to her eyes, "only think, that it is barely nine months since he was with me!"

"Six, you mean, aunt," said Kate, unadvisedly.

"Only nine months!" repeated Mrs. Greenow, as though she had not heard her niece. "Only nine months!" After that Kate attempted to correct no more such errors. "It happened in May, miss," Jeannette said afterwards to Miss Vavasor, "and that, as we reckons, it will be just a twelvemonth come Christmas." But Kate paid no attention to this.

And Jeannette was very ungrateful, and certainly should have indulged herself in no such sarcasms. When Mrs. Greenow made a slight change in her mourning, which she did on her arrival at Norwich, using a little lace among her crapes, Jeannette reaped a rich harvest in gifts of clothes. Mrs. Greenow

knew well enough that she expected more from a servant than mere service;—that she wanted loyalty, discretion, and perhaps sometimes a little secrecy;—and as she paid for these things, she should have had them.

Kate undertook to stay a month with her aunt at Norwich, and Mrs. Greenow undertook that Mr. Cheesacre should declare himself as Kate's lover before the expiration of the month. It was in vain that Kate protested that she wanted no such lover, and that she would certainly reject him if he came. "That 's all very well, my dear," Aunt Greenow would say. "A girl must settle herself some day, you know;—and you 'd have it all your own way at Oilymead."

But the offer certainly showed much generosity on the part of Aunt Greenow, inasmuch as Mr. Cheesacre's attentions were apparently paid to herself rather than to her niece. Mr. Cheesacre was very attentive. He had taken the lodgings in the Close, and had sent over fowls and cream from Oilymead, and had called on the morning after their arrival; but in all his attentions he distinguished the aunt more particularly than the niece. "I am all for Mr. Cheesacre, miss," said Jeannette once. "The captain is perhaps the nicerer-looking gentleman, and he ain't so podgy like; but what 's good looks if a gentleman has n't got nothing? I can't abide anything that 's poor; neither can't missus." From which it was evident that Jeannette gave Miss Vavasor no credit in having Mr. Cheesacre in her train.

Captain Bellfield was also at Norwich, having obtained some quasi-military employment there in the

matter of drilling volunteers. Certain capacities in that line it may be supposed that he possessed, and, as his friend Cheesacre said of him, he was going to earn an honest penny once in his life. The captain and Mr. Cheesacre had made up any little differences that had existed between them at Yarmouth, and were close allies again when they left that place. Some little compact on matters of business must have been arranged between them,—for the captain was in funds again. He was in funds again through the liberality of his friend,—and no payment of former loans had been made, nor had there been any speech of such. Mr. Cheesacre had drawn his purse-strings liberally, and had declared that if all went well the hospitality of Oilymead should not be wanting during the winter. Captain Bellfield had nodded his head and declared that all should go well.

"You won't see much of the captain, I suppose," said Mr. Cheesacre to Mrs. Greenow on the morning of the day after her arrival at Norwich. He had come across the whole way from Oilymead to ask her if she found herself comfortable,—and perhaps with an eye to the Norwich markets at the same time. He now wore a pair of black riding boots over his trousers, and a round topped hat, and looked much more at home than he had done by the sea-side.

"Not much, I dare say," said the widow. "He tells me that he must be on duty ten or twelve hours a day. Poor fellow!"

"It 's a deuced good thing for him, and he ought to be very much obliged to me for putting him in the way of getting it. But he told me to tell you that if he did n't call, you were not to be angry with him."

"Oh no;—I shall remember, of course."

"You see, if he don't work now he must come to grief. He has n't got a shilling that he can call his own."

"Has n't he really?"

"Not a shilling, Mrs. Greenow;—and then he 's awfully in debt. He is n't a bad fellow, you know, only there 's no trusting him for anything." Then after a few further inquiries that were almost tender, and a promise of further supplies from the dairy, Mr. Cheesacre took his leave, almost forgetting to ask after Miss Vavasor.

But as he left the house he had a word to say to Jeannette. "He has n't been here, has he, Jenny?" "We have n't seen a sight of him yet, sir,—and I have thought it a little odd." Then Mr. Cheesacre gave the girl half-a-crown, and went his way. Jeannette, I think, must have forgotten that the captain had looked in after leaving his military duties on the preceding evening.

The captain's ten or twelve hours of daily work was performed, no doubt, at irregular intervals,—some days late and some days early,—for he might be seen about Norwich almost at all times, during the early part of that November;—and he might be very often seen going into the Close. In Norwich there are two weekly market-days, but on those days the captain was no doubt kept more entirely to his military employment, for at such times he never was seen near the Close. Now Mr. Cheesacre's visits to the town were generally made on market-days, and so it happened that they did not meet. On such occasions Mr. Cheesacre always was driven to Mrs. Greenow's

door in a cab,—for he would come into town by railway,—and he would deposit a basket bearing the rich produce of his dairy. It was in vain that Mrs. Greenow protested against these gifts,—for she did protest and declared that if they were continued they would be sent back. They were, however, continued, and Mrs. Greenow was at her wits' end about them. Cheesacre would not come up with them; but leaving them, would go about his business, and would return to see the ladies. On such occasions he would be very particular in getting his basket from Jeannette. As he did so he would generally ask some question about the captain, and Jeannette would give him answers confidentially,—so that there was a strong friendship between these two.

"What am I to do about it?" said Mrs. Greenow, as Kate came into the sitting-room one morning, and saw on the table a small hamper lined with a clean cloth. "It 's as much as Jeannette has been able to carry."

"So it is, ma'am,—quite; and I 'm strong in the arm, too, ma'am."

"What am I to do, Kate? He is such a good creature."

"And he do admire you both so much," said Jeannette.

"Of course I don't want to offend him for many reasons," said the aunt, looking knowingly at her niece.

"I don't know anything about your reasons, aunt, but if I were you, I should leave the basket just as it is till he comes in the afternoon."

"Would you mind seeing him yourself, Kate, and explaining to him that it won't do to go on in this

way? Perhaps you would n't mind telling him that if he 'll promise not to bring any more you won't object to take this one."

"Indeed, aunt, I can't do that. They 're not brought to me."

"Oh, Kate!"

"Nonsense, aunt;—I won't have you say so;—before Jeannette, too."

"I think it 's for both, ma'am; I do indeed. And there certainly ain't any cream to be bought like it in Norwich; nor yet eggs."

"I wonder what there is in the basket." And the widow lifted up the corner of the cloth. "I declare if there is n't a turkey poult already."

"My!" said Jeannette. "A turkey poult! Why, that 's worth ten and sixpence in the market if it 's worth a penny."

"It 's out of the question that I should take upon myself to say anything to him about it," said Kate.

"Upon my word I don't see why you should n't, as well as I," said Mrs. Greenow.

"I 'll tell you what, ma'am," said Jeannette: "let me just ask him who they 're for;—he 'll tell me anything."

"Don't do anything of the kind, Jeannette," said Kate. "Of course, aunt, they 're brought for you. There 's no doubt about that. A gentleman does n't bring cream and turkeys to—— I never heard of such a thing!"

"I don't see why a gentleman should n't bring cream and turkeys to you just as well as to me. Indeed, he told me once as much himself."

"Then, if they 're for me, I 'll leave them down outside the front door, and he may find his provisions there." And Kate proceeded to lift the basket off the table.

"Leave it alone, Kate," said Mrs. Greenow, with a voice that was rather solemn; and which had, too, something of sadness in its tone. "Leave it alone. I 'll see Mr. Cheesacre myself."

"And I do hope you won't mention my name. It 's the most absurd thing in the world. The man never spoke two dozen words to me in his life."

"He speaks to me, though," said Mrs. Greenow.

"I dare say he does," said Kate.

"And about you, too, my dear."

"He does n't come here with those big flowers in his button-hole for nothing," said Jeannette,—"not if I knows what a gentleman means."

"Of course he does n't," said Mrs. Greenow.

"If you don't object, aunt," said Kate, "I will write to grandpapa and tell him that I will return home at once."

"What!—because of Mr. Cheesacre?" said Mrs. Greenow. "I don't think you 'll be so silly as that, my dear."

On the present occasion Mrs. Greenow undertook that she would see the generous gentleman, and endeavour to stop the supplies from his farmyard. It was well understood that he would call about four o'clock, when his business in the town would be over; and that he would bring with him a little boy, who would carry away the basket. At that hour Kate of course was absent, and the widow received Mr.

Cheesacre alone. The basket and cloth were there, in the sitting-room, and on the table were laid out the rich things which it had contained;—the turkey poult first, on a dish provided in the lodging-house, then a dozen fresh eggs in a soup-plate, then the cream in a little tin can, which, for the last fortnight, had passed regularly between Oilymead and the house in the Close, and as to which Mr. Cheesacre was very pointed in his inquiries with Jeannette. Then behind the cream there were two or three heads of brocoli, and a stick of celery as thick as a man's wrist. Altogether the tribute was a very comfortable assistance to the housekeeping of a lady living in a small way in lodgings.

Mr. Cheesacre, when he saw the array on the long sofa-table, knew that he was to prepare himself for some resistance; but that resistance would give him, he thought, an opportunity of saying a few words that he was desirous of speaking, and he did not altogether regret it. "I just called in," he said, "to see how you were."

"We are not likely to starve," said Mrs. Greenow, pointing to the delicacies from Oilymead.

"Just a few trifles that my old woman asked me to bring in," said Cheesacre. "She insisted on putting them up."

"But your old woman is by far too magnificent," said Mrs. Greenow. "She really frightens Kate and me out of our wits."

Mr. Cheesacre had no wish that Miss Vavasor's name should be brought into play upon the occasion. "Dear Mrs. Greenow," said he, "there is no cause for you to be alarmed, I can assure you. Mere trifles;—

light as air, you know. I don't think anything of such things as these."

"But I and Kate think a great deal of them,—a very great deal, I can assure you. Do you know, we had a long debate this morning whether or no we would return them to Oilymead?"

"Return them, Mrs. Greenow!"

"Yes, indeed: what are women, situated as we are, to do under such circumstances? When gentlemen will be too liberal, their liberality must be repressed."

"And have I been too liberal, Mrs. Greenow? What is a young turkey and a stick of celery when a man is willing to give everything that he has in the world?"

"You 've got a great deal more in the world, Mr. Cheesacre, than you 'd like to part with. But we won't talk of that now."

"When shall we talk of it?"

"If you really have anything to say, you had by far better speak to Kate herself."

"Mrs. Greenow, you mistake me. Indeed you mistake me." Just at this moment, as he was drawing close to the widow, she heard, or fancied that she heard, Jeannette's step, and, going to the sitting-room door, called to her maid. Jeannette did not hear her, but the bell was rung, and then Jeannette came. "You may take these things down, Jeannette," she said. "Mr. Cheesacre has promised that no more shall come."

"But I have n't promised," said Mr. Cheesacre.

"You will oblige me and Kate, I know;—and, Jeannette, tell Miss Vavasor that I am ready to walk with her."

Then Mr. Cheesacre knew that he could not say those few words on that occasion; and as the hour of his train was near, he took his departure, and went out of the Close, followed by the little boy, carrying the basket, the cloth, and the tin can.

CHAPTER XX.

WHICH SHALL IT BE?

THE next day was Sunday, and it was well known at the lodging-house in the Close that Mr. Cheesacre would not be seen there then. Mrs. Greenow had specially warned him that she was not fond of Sunday visitors, fearing that otherwise he might find it convenient to give them too much of his society on that idle day. In the morning the aunt and niece both went to the cathedral, and then at three o'clock they dined. But on this occasion they did not dine alone. Charlie Fairstairs, who, with her family, had come home from Yarmouth, had been asked to join them; and in order that Charlie might not feel it dull, Mrs. Greenow had, with her usual good-nature, invited Captain Bellfield. A very nice little dinner they had. The captain carved the turkey, giving due honour to Mr. Cheesacre as he did so; and when he nibbled his celery with his cheese he was prettily jocose about the richness of the farmyard at Oilymead.

"He is the most generous man I ever met," said Mrs. Greenow.

"So he is," said Captain Bellfield, "and we 'll drink his health. Poor old Cheesy! It 's a great pity he should n't get himself a wife."

"I don't know any man more calculated to make a young woman happy," said Mrs. Greenow.

"No, indeed," said Miss Fairstairs. "I 'm told that his house and all about it is quite beautiful."

"Especially the straw-yard and the horse-pond," said the captain. And then they drank the health of their absent friend.

It had been arranged that the ladies should go to church in the evening, and it was thought that Captain Bellfield would, perhaps, accompany them; but when the time for starting came, Kate and Charlie were ready, but the widow was not, and she remained,—in order, as she afterwards explained to Kate, that Captain Bellfield might not seem to be turned out of the house. He had made no offer churchwards, and,—"Poor man," as Mrs. Greenow said in her little explanation, "if I had n't let him stay there, he would have had no resting-place for the sole of his foot, but some horrid barrack-room!" Therefore the captain was allowed to find a resting-place in Mrs. Greenow's drawing-room; but on the return of the young ladies from church, he was not there, and the widow was alone, "looking back," she said, "to things that were gone;—that were gone. But come, dears, I am not going to make you melancholy." So they had tea, and Mr. Cheesacre's cream was used with liberality.

Captain Bellfield had not allowed the opportunity to slip idly from his hands. In the first quarter of an hour after the young ladies had gone, he said little or nothing, but sat with a wine-glass before him, which once or twice he filled from the decanter. "I 'm afraid the wine is not very good," said Mrs. Greenow. "But one can't get good wine in lodgings."

"I 'm not thinking very much about it, Mrs. Greenow; that 's the truth," said the captain. "I dare

say the wine is very good of its kind." Then there was another period of silence between them.

"I suppose you find it rather dull, living in lodgings; don't you?" asked the captain.

"I don't know quite what you mean by dull, Captain Bellfield; but a woman circumstanced as I am can't find her life very gay. It 's not a full twelvemonth yet since I lost all that made life desirable, and sometimes I wonder at myself for holding up as well as I do."

"It 's wicked to give way to grief too much, Mrs. Greenow."

"That 's what my dear Kate always says to me, and I 'm sure I do my best to overcome it." Upon this some soft tears trickled down her cheek, showing in their course that she at any rate used no paint in producing that freshness of colour which was one of her great charms. Then she pressed her handkerchief to her eyes, and removing it, smiled faintly on the captain. "I did n't intend to treat you to such a scene as this, Captain Bellfield."

"There is nothing on earth, Mrs. Greenow, I desire so much as permission to dry those tears."

"Time alone can do that, Captain Bellfield;—time alone."

"But cannot time be aided by love and friendship and affection?"

"By friendship, yes. What would life be worth without the solace of friendship?"

"And how much better is the warm glow of love?" Captain Bellfield, as he asked this question, deliberately got up and moved his chair over to the widow's side. But the widow as deliberately changed her position to

the corner of a sofa. The captain did not at once follow her, nor did he in any way show that he was aware that she had fled from him.

"How much better is the warm glow of love?" he said again, contenting himself with looking into her face with all his eyes. He had hoped that he would have been able to press her hand by this time.

"The warm glow of love, Captain Bellfield, if you have ever felt it——"

"If I have ever felt it! Do I not feel it now, Mrs. Greenow? There can be no longer any mask kept upon my feelings. I never could restrain the yearnings of my heart when they have been strong."

"Have they often been strong, Captain Bellfield?"

"Yes, often;—in various scenes of life; on the field of battle——"

"I did not know that you had seen active service."

"What!—not on the plains of Zululand, when with fifty picked men I kept five hundred Caffres at bay for seven weeks;—never knew the comfort of a bed, or a pillow to my head, for seven long weeks!"

"Not for seven long weeks?" said Mrs. Greenow.

"No. Did I not see active service at Essiquebo, on the burning coast of Guiana, when all the wild Africans from the woods rose up to destroy the colony; or again at the mouth of the Kitchyhomy River, when I made good the capture of a slaver by my own hand and my own sword!"

"I really had n't heard," said Mrs. Greenow.

"Ah, I understand. I know. Cheesy is the best fellow in the world in some respects, but he cannot bring himself to speak well of a fellow behind his back. I know who has belittled me. Who was the first to

storm the heights of Inkerman?" demanded the captain, thinking in the heat of the moment that he might as well be hung for a sheep as a lamb.

"But when you spoke of yearnings, I thought you meant yearnings of a softer kind."

"So I did. So I did. I don't know why I have been led away to speak of deeds that are very seldom mentioned, at any rate by myself. But I cannot bear that a slanderous backbiting tongue should make you think that I have seen no service. I have served her Majesty in the four quarters of the globe, Mrs. Greenow; and now I am ready to serve you in any way in which you will allow me to make my service acceptable." Whereupon he took one stride over to the sofa, and went down upon his knees before her.

"But, Captain Bellfield, I don't want any services. Pray get up, now; the girl will come in."

"I care nothing for any girl. I am planted here till some answer shall have been made to me; till some word shall have been said that may give me a little hope." Then he attempted to get hold of her hand, but she put them behind her back and shook her head. "Arabella," he said, "will you not speak a word to me?"

"Not a word, Captain Bellfield, till you get up; and I won't have you call me Arabella. I am the widow of Samuel Greenow, than whom no man was more respected where he was known, and it is not fitting that I should be addressed in that way."

"But I want you to become my wife,—and then——"

"Ah, then indeed! But that then is n't likely to come. Get up, Captain Bellfield, or I 'll push you

over and then ring the bell. A man never looks so much like a fool as when he 's kneeling down,—unless he 's saying his prayers, as you ought to be doing now. Get up, I tell you. It 's just half-past seven, and I told Jeannette to come to me then."

There was that in the widow's voice which made him get up, and he rose slowly to his feet. "You 've pushed all the chairs about, you stupid man," she said. Then in one minute she had restored the scattered furniture to their proper places, and had rung the bell. When Jeannette came she desired that tea might be ready by the time that the young ladies returned, and asked Captain Bellfield if a cup should be set for him. This he declined, and bade her farewell while Jeannette was still in the room. She shook hands with him without any sign of anger, and even expressed a hope that they might see him again before long.

"He 's a very handsome man, is the captain," said Jeannette, as the hero of the Kitchyhomy River descended the stairs.

"You should n't think about handsome men, child," said Mrs. Greenow.

"And I 'm sure I don't," said Jeannette. "Not no more than anybody else; but if a man is handsome, ma'am, why it stands to reason that he is handsome."

"I suppose Captain Bellfield has given you a kiss and a pair of gloves."

"As for gloves and such like, Mr. Cheesacre is much better for giving than the captain; as we all know; don't we, ma'am? But in regard to kisses, they 're presents as I never takes from anybody. Let everybody pay his debts. If the captain ever gets a wife, let him kiss her."

On the following Tuesday morning Mr. Cheesacre as usual called in the Close, but he brought with him no basket. He merely left a winter nosegay made of green leaves and laurestinus flowers, and sent up a message to say that he should call at half-past three, and hoped that he might then be able to see Mrs. Greenow,—on particular business.

"That means you, Kate," said Mrs. Greenow.

"No, it does n't; it does n't mean me at all. At any rate he won't see me."

"I dare say it 's me he wishes to see. It seems to be the fashionable plan now for gentlemen to make offers by deputy. If he says anything, I can only refer him to you, you know."

"Yes, you can; you can tell him simply that I won't have him. But he is no more thinking of me than——

"Than he is of me, you were going to say."

"No, aunt; I was n't going to say that at all."

"Well, we shall see. If he does mean anything, of course you can please yourself; but I really think you might do worse."

"But if I don't want to do at all?"

"Very well; you must have your own way. I can only tell you what I think."

At half-past three o'clock punctually Mr. Cheesacre came to the door, and was shown upstairs. He was told by Jeannette that Captain Bellfield had looked in on the Sunday afternoon, but that Miss Fairstairs and Miss Vavasor had been there the whole time. He had not got on his black boots nor yet had his round topped hat. And as he did wear a new frock-coat, and had his left hand thrust into a kid glove, Jean-

nette was quite sure that he intended business of some kind. With new boots, creaking loudly, he walked up into the drawing-room, and there he found the widow alone.

"Thanks for the flowers," she said at once. "It was so good of you to bring something that we could accept."

"As for that," said he, "I don't see why you should scruple about a trifle of cream, but I hope that any such feeling as that will be over before long." To this the widow made no answer, but she looked very sweetly on him as she bade him sit down.

He did sit down; but first he put his hat and stick carefully away in one corner, and then he pulled off his glove—somewhat laboriously, for his hand was warm. He was clearly prepared for great things. As he pushed up his hair with his hands there came from his locks an ambrosial perfume,—as of marrow-oil, and there was a fixed propriety of position of every hair of his whiskers which indicated very plainly that he had been at a hairdresser's shop since he left the market. Nor do I believe that he had worn that coat when he came to the door earlier in the morning. If I were to say that he had called at his tailor's also, I do not think that I should be wrong.

"How goes everything at Oilymead?" said Mrs. Greenow, seeing that her guest wanted some little assistance in leading off the conversation.

"Pretty well, Mrs. Greenow; pretty well. Everything will go very well if I am successful in the object which I have on hand to-day."

"I 'm sure I hope you 'll be successful in all your undertakings."

"In all my business undertakings I am, Mrs. Greenow. There is n't a shilling due on my land to e'er a bank in Norwich; and I have n't thrashed out a quarter of last year's corn yet, which is more than many of them can say. But there ain't many of them who don't have to pay rent, and so perhaps I ought n't to boast."

"I know that Providence has been very good to you, Mr. Cheesacre, as regards worldly matters."

"And I have n't left it all to Providence, either. Those who do, generally go to the wall, as far as I can see. I 'm always at work late and early, and I know when I get a profit out of a man's labour and when I don't, as well as though it was my only chance of bread and cheese."

"I always thought you understood farming business, Mr. Cheesacre."

"Yes, I do. I like a bit of fun well enough, when the time for it comes, as you saw at Yarmouth. And I keep my three or four hunters, as I think a country gentleman should; and I shoot over my own ground. But I always stick to my work. There are men, like Bellfield, who won't work. What do they come to? They 're always borrowing."

"But he has fought his country's battles, Mr. Cheesacre."

"He fight! I suppose he 's been telling you some of his old stories. He was ten years in the West Indies, and all his fighting was with the musquitoes."

"But he was in the Crimea. At Inkerman, for instance——"

"He in the Crimea! Well, never mind. But do you inquire before you believe that story. But as I

was saying, Mrs. Greenow, you have seen my little place at Oilymead."

"A charming house. All you want is a mistress for it."

"That 's it; that 's just it. All I want is a mistress for it. And there 's only one woman on earth that I would wish to see in that position. Arabella Greenow, will you be that woman?" As he made the offer he got up and stood before her, placing his right hand upon his heart.

"I, Mr. Cheesacre!" she said.

"Yes, you. Who else? Since I saw you what other woman has been anything to me; or, indeed, I may say before? Since the first day I saw you I felt that there my happiness depended."

"Oh, Mr. Cheesacre, I thought you were looking elsewhere."

"No, no, no. There never was such a mistake as that. I have the highest regard and esteem for Miss Vavasor, but really——"

"Mr. Cheesacre, what am I to say to you?"

"What are you to say to me? Say that you 'll be mine. Say that I shall be yours. Say that all I have at Oilymead shall be yours. Say that the open carriage for a pair of ponies to be driven by a lady which I have been looking at this morning shall be yours. Yes, indeed; the sweetest thing you ever saw in your life,—just like one that the lady of the Lord Lieutenant drives about in always. That 's what you must say. Come, Mrs. Greenow!"

"Ah, Mr. Cheesacre, you don't know what it is to have buried the pride of your youth hardly yet twelve months."

"But you have buried him, and there let there be an end of it. Your sitting here all alone, morning, noon, and night, won't bring him back. I 'm sorry for him; I am indeed. Poor Greenow! But what more can I do?"

"I can do more, Mr. Cheesacre. I can mourn for him in solitude and in silence."

"No, no, no. What 's the use of it,—breaking your heart for nothing,—and my heart too. You never think of that." And Mr. Cheesacre spoke in a tone that was full of reproach.

"It cannot be, Mr. Cheesacre."

"Ah, but it can be. Come, Mrs. Greenow. We understand each other well enough now, surely. Come, dearest." And he approached her as though to put his arm round her waist. But at that moment there came a knock at the door, and Jeannette, entering the room, told her mistress that Captain Bellfield was below and wanted to know whether he could see her for a minute on particular business.

"Show Captain Bellfield up, certainly," said Mrs. Greenow.

"D—— Captain Bellfield!" said Mr. Cheesacre.

CHAPTER XXI.

ALICE IS TAUGHT TO GROW UPWARDS, TOWARDS THE LIGHT.

Before the day came on which Alice was to go to Matching Priory, she had often regretted that she had been induced to make the promise, and yet she had as often resolved that there was no possible reason why she should not go to Matching Priory. But she feared this commencement of a closer connection with her great relations. She had told herself so often that she was quite separated from them, that the slight accident of blood in no way tied her to them or them to her,—this lesson had been so thoroughly taught to her by the injudicious attempts of Lady Macleod to teach an opposite lesson, that she did not like the idea of putting aside the effect of that teaching. And perhaps she was a little afraid of the great folk whom she might probably meet at her cousin's house. Lady Glencora herself she had liked,—and had loved too with that momentary love which certain circumstances of our life will sometimes produce, a love which is strong while it lasts, but which can be laid down when the need of it is past. She had liked and loved Lady Glencora, and had in no degree been afraid of her during those strange visitings in Queen Anne Street;—but she was by no means sure that she should like Lady Glencora in the midst of her grand-

eur and surrounded by the pomp of her rank. She would have no other friend or acquaintance in that house, and feared that she might find herself desolate, cold, and wounded in her pride. She had been tricked into the visit, too, or rather had tricked herself into it. She had been sure that there had been a joint scheme between her cousin and Lady Midlothian, and could not resist the temptation of repudiating it in her letter to Lady Glencora. But there had been no such scheme; she had wronged Lady Glencora, and had therefore been unable to resist her second request. But she felt unhappy, fearing that she would be out of her element, and more than once half made up her mind to excuse herself.

Her aunt had, from the first, thought well of her going, believing that it might probably be the means of reconciling her to Mr. Grey. Moreover, it was a step altogether in the right direction. Lady Glencora would, if she lived, become a duchess, and as she was decidedly Alice's cousin, of course Alice should go to her house when invited. It must be acknowledged that Lady Macleod was not selfish in her worship of rank. She had played out her game in life, and there was no probability that she would live to be called cousin by a Duchess of Omnium. She bade Alice go to Matching Priory, simply because she loved her niece, and therefore wished her to live in the best and most eligible way within her reach. "I think you owe it as a duty to your family to go," said Lady Macleod.

What further correspondence about her affairs had passed between Lady Macleod and Lady Midlothian Alice never knew. She steadily refused all entreaty

made that she would answer the Countess's letter, and at last threatened her aunt that if the request were further urged she would answer it,—telling Lady Midlothian that she had been very impertinent.

"I am becoming a very old woman, Alice," the poor lady said, piteously, "and I suppose I had better not interfere any further. Whatever I have said I have always meant to be for your good." Then Alice got up, and kissing her aunt, tried to explain to her that she resented no interference from her, and felt grateful for all that she both said and did; but that she could not endure meddling from people whom she did not know, and who thought themselves entitled to meddle by their rank.

"And because they are cousins as well," said Lady Macleod, in a softly sad, apologetic voice.

Alice left Cheltenham about the middle of November on her road to Matching Priory. She was to sleep in London one night, and go down to Matching in Yorkshire with her maid on the following day. Her father undertook to meet her at the Great Western station, and to take her on the following morning to the Great Northern. He said nothing in his letter about dining with her, but when he met her, muttered something about an engagement, and taking her home graciously promised that he would breakfast with her on the following morning.

"I 'm very glad you are going, Alice," he said when they were in the cab together.

"Why, papa?"

"Why?—because I think it 's the proper thing to do. You know I 've never said much to you about these people. They 're not connected with me, and I

know that they hate the name of Vavasor;—not but what the name is a deal older than any of theirs, and the family too."

"And therefore I don't understand why you think I 'm specially right. If you were to say I was specially wrong, I should be less surprised, and of course I should n't go."

"You should go by all means. Rank and wealth are advantages, let anybody say what they will to the contrary. Why else does everybody want to get them?"

"But I shan't get them by going to Matching Priory."

"You 'll get part of their value. Take them as a whole, the nobility of England are pleasant acquaintances to have. I have n't run after them very much myself, though I married, as I may say, among them. That very thing rather stood in my way than otherwise. But you may be sure of this, that men and women ought to grow, like plants, upwards. Everybody should endeavour to stand as well as he can in the world, and if I had a choice of acquaintance between a sugar-baker and a peer, I should prefer the peer,—unless, indeed, the sugar-baker had something very strong on his side to offer. I don't call that tuft-hunting, and it does not necessitate toadying. It 's simply growing up, towards the light, as the trees do."

Alice listened to her father's worldly wisdom with a smile, but she did not attempt to answer him. It was very seldom, indeed, that he took upon himself the labour of lecturing her, or that he gave her even as much counsel as he had given now. "Well, papa, I hope I shall find myself growing towards the light,"

she said as she got out of the cab. Then he had not entered the house, but had taken the cab on with him to his club.

On her table Alice found a note from her cousin George. "I hear you are going down to the Pallisers at Matching Priory to-morrow, and as I shall be glad to say one word to you before you go, will you let me see you this evening,—say at nine?—G. V." She felt immediately that she could not help seeing him, but she greatly regretted the necessity. She wished that she had gone directly from Cheltenham to the North, —regardless even of those changes of wardrobe which her purposed visit required. Then she sat herself to considering. How had George heard of her visit to the Priory, and how had he learned the precise evening which she would pass in London? Why should he be so intent on watching all her movements as it seemed that he was? As to seeing him she had no alternative, so she completed her arrangements for her journey before nine, and then awaited him in the drawing-room.

"I 'm so glad you 're going to Matching Priory," were the first words he said. He, too, might have taught her to grow towards the light, if she had asked him for his reasons;—but this she did not do just then.

"How did you learn that I was going?" she said.

"I heard it from a friend of mine. Well;—from Burgo Fitzgerald, if you must know."

"From Mr. Fitzgerald?" said Alice, in profound astonishment. "How could Mr. Fitzgerald have heard of it?"

"That 's more than I know, Alice. Not directly from Lady Glencora, I should say."

"That would be impossible."

"Yes; quite so, no doubt. I think she keeps up her intimacy with Burgo's sister, and perhaps it got round to him in that way."

"And did he tell you also that I was going to-morrow? He must have known all about it very accurately."

"No; then I asked Kate, and Kate told me when you were going. Yes; I know. Kate has been wrong, has n't she? Kate was cautioned, no doubt, to say nothing about your comings and goings to so inconsiderable a person as myself. But you must not be down upon Kate. She never mentioned it till I showed by my question to her that I knew all about your journey to Matching. I own I do not understand why it should be necessary to keep me so much in the dark."

Alice felt that she was blushing. The caution had been given to Kate because Kate still transgressed in her letters, by saying little words about her brother. And Alice did not even now believe Kate to have been false to her; but she saw that she herself had been imprudent.

"I cannot understand it," continued George, speaking without looking at her. "It was but the other day that we were such dear friends! Do you remember the balcony at Basle? and now it seems that we are quite estranged;—nay, worse than estranged; that I am, as it were, under some ban. Have I done anything to offend you, Alice? If so, speak out, like a woman of spirit as you are."

"Nothing," said Alice.

"Then why am I tabooed? Why was I told the

other day that I might not congratulate you on your happy emancipation? I say boldly, that had you resolved on that while we were together in Switzerland, you would have permitted me, as a friend, almost as a brother, to discuss it with you."

"I think not, George."

"I am sure you would. And why has Kate been warned not to tell me of this visit to the Pallisers? I know she has been warned though she has not confessed it."

Alice sat silent, not knowing what to say in answer to this charge brought against her,—thinking, perhaps, that the questioner would allow his question to pass without an answer. But Vavasor was not so complaisant. "If there be any reason, Alice, I think that I have a right to ask it."

For a few seconds she did not speak a word, but sat considering. He also remained silent with his eyes fixed upon her. She looked at him and saw nothing but his scar,—nothing but his scar and the brightness of his eyes, which was almost fierce. She knew that he was in earnest, and therefore resolved that she would be in earnest also. "I think that you have such a right," she said at last.

"Then let me exercise it."

"I think that you have such a right, but I think also that you are ungenerous to exercise it."

"I cannot understand that. By heavens, Alice, I cannot be left in this suspense! If I have done anything to offend you, perhaps I can remove the offence by apology."

"You have done nothing to offend me."

"Or if there be any cause why our friendship should

be dropped,—why we should be on a different footing to each other in London than we were in Switzerland, I may acknowledge it, if it be explained to me. But I cannot put up with the doubt, when I am told that I have a right to demand its solution."

"Then I will be frank with you, George, though my being so will, as you may guess, be very painful." She paused again, looking at him to see if yet he would spare her; but he was all scar and eyes as before, and there was no mercy in his face.

"Your sister, George, has thought that my parting with Mr. Grey might lead to a renewal of a purpose of marriage between you and me. You know her eagerness, and will understand that it may have been necessary that I should require silence from her on that head. You ought now to understand it all."

"I then am being punished for her sins," he said; and suddenly the scar on his face was healed up again, and there was something of the old pleasantness in his eyes.

"I have said nothing about any sins, George, but I have found it necessary to be on my guard."

"Well," he said, after a short pause, "you are an honest woman, Alice,—the honestest I ever knew. I will bring Kate to order,—and, now, we may be friends again; may we not?" And he extended his hand to her across the table.

"Yes," she said, "certainly; if you wish it." She spoke doubtingly, with indecision in her voice, as though remembering at the moment that he had given her no pledge.

"I certainly do wish it very much," said he; and then she gave him her hand. "And I may now talk about your new freedom?"

"No," said she; "no. Do not speak of that. A woman does not do what I have done in that affair without great suffering. I have to think of it daily; but do not make me speak of it."

"But this other subject, this visit to Matching; surely I may speak of that?"

There was something now in his voice so bright, that she felt the influence of it, and answered him cheerfully, "I don't see what you can have to say about it."

"But I have a great deal. I am so glad you are going. Mind you cement a close intimacy with Mr. Palliser."

"With Mr. Palliser?"

"Yes; with Mr. Palliser. You must read all the blue books about finance. I 'll send them to you if you like it."

"Oh, George!"

"I 'm quite in earnest. That is, not in earnest about the blue books, as you would not have time; but about Mr. Palliser. He will be the new Chancellor of the Exchequer without a doubt."

"Will he, indeed? But why should I make a bosom friend of the Chancellor of the Exchequer? I don't want any public money."

"But I do, my girl. Don't you see?"

"No; I don't."

"I think I shall get returned at this next election."

"I 'm sure I hope you will."

"And if I do, of course it will be my game to support the ministry;—or rather the new ministry; for of course there will be changes."

"I hope they will be on the right side."

"Not a doubt of that, Alice."

"I wish they might be changed altogether."

"Ah! that 's impossible. It 's very well as a dream; but there are no such men as you want to see,—men really from the people,—strong enough to take high office. A man can't drive four horses because he 's a philanthropist,—or rather a philhorseophist, and is desirous that the team should be driven without any hurt to them. A man can't govern well simply because he is genuinely anxious that men should be well governed."

"And will there never be any such men?"

"I won't say that. I don't mind confessing to you that it is my ambition to be such a one myself. But a child must crawl before he can walk. Such a one as I, hoping to do something in politics, must spare no chance. It would be something to me that Mr. Palliser should become the friend of any dear friend of mine,—especially of a dear friend bearing the same name."

"I 'm afraid, George, you 'll find me a bad hand at making any such friendship."

"They say he is led immensely by his wife, and that she is very clever. But I mean this chiefly, Alice, that I do hope I shall have all your sympathy in any political career that I may make, and all your assistance also."

"My sympathy I think I can promise you. My assistance, I fear, would be worthless."

"By no means worthless, Alice; not if I see you take that place in the world which I hope to see you fill. Do you think women now-a-days have no bearing upon the politics of the times? Almost as much

as men have." In answer to which Alice shook her head; but, nevertheless, she felt in some way pleased and flattered.

George left her without saying a word more about her marriage prospects past or future, and Alice as she went to bed felt glad that this explanation between them had been made.

CHAPTER XXII.

DANDY AND FLIRT.

ALICE reached the Matching Road Station about three o'clock in the afternoon without adventure, and immediately on the stopping of the train became aware that all trouble was off her own hands. A servant in livery came to the open window, and touching his hat to her, inquired if she were Miss Vavasor. Then her dressing-bag and shawls and cloaks were taken from her, and she was conveyed through the station by the station-master on one side of her, the footman on the other, and by the railway porter behind. She instantly perceived that she had become possessed of great privileges by belonging even for a time to Matching Priory, and that she was essentially growing upwards towards the light.

Outside, on the broad drive before the little station, she saw an omnibus that was going to the small town of Matching, intended for people who had not grown upwards as had been her lot; and she saw also a light stylish-looking cart which she would have called a Whitechapel had she been properly instructed in such matters, and a little low open carriage with two beautiful small horses, in which was sitting a lady enveloped in furs. Of course this was Lady Glencora. Another servant was standing on the ground, holding the horses of the carriage and the cart.

"Dear Alice, I 'm so glad you 've come," said a voice from the furs. "Look here, dear; your maid can go in the dog-cart with your things,"—it was n't a dog-cart, but Lady Glencora knew no better;—"she 'll be quite comfortable there; and do you get in here. Are you very cold?"

"Oh no; not cold at all."

"But it is awfully cold. You 've been in the stuffy carriage, but you 'll find it cold enough out here, I can tell you."

"Oh! Lady Glencora, I am so sorry that I 've brought you out on such a morning," said Alice, getting in and taking the place assigned her next to the charioteer.

"What nonsense! Sorry! Why I 've looked forward to meeting you all alone, ever since I knew you were coming. If it had snowed all the morning I should have come just the same. I drive out almost every day when I 'm down here,—that is, when the house is not too crowded, or I can make an excuse. Wrap these things over you; there are plenty of them. You shall drive if you like." Alice, however, declined the driving, expressing her gratitude in what prettiest words she could find.

"I like driving better than anything, I think. Mr. Palliser does n't like ladies to hunt, and of course it would n't do as he does not hunt himself. I do ride, but he never gets on horseback. I almost fancy I should like to drive four-in-hand,—only I know I should be afraid."

"It would look very terrible," said Alice.

"Yes; would n't it? The look would be the worst of it; as it is all the world over. Sometimes I wish

there were no such things as looks. I don't mean anything improper, you know; only one does get so hampered, right and left, for fear of Mrs. Grundy. I endeavour to go straight, and get along pretty well on the whole, I suppose. Baker, you must put Dandy in the bar; he pulls so, going home, that I can't hold him in the check." She stopped the horses, and Baker, a very completely-got-up groom of some forty years of age, who sat behind, got down and put the impetuous Dandy "in the bar," thereby changing the rein, so that the curb was brought to bear on him. "They 're called Dandy and Flirt," continued Lady Glencora, speaking to Alice. "Ain't they a beautiful match? The Duke gave them to me and named them himself. Did you ever see the Duke?"

"Never," said Alice.

"He won't be here before Christmas, but you shall be introduced some day in London. He 's an excellent creature and I 'm a great pet of his; though, after all, I never speak half-a-dozen words to him when I see him. He 's one of those people who never talk. I 'm one of those who like talking, as you 'll find out. I think it runs in families; and the Pallisers are non-talkers. That does n't mean that they are not speakers, for Mr. Palliser has plenty to say in the House, and they declare that he 's one of the few public men who 've got lungs enough to make a financial statement without breaking down."

Alice was aware that she had as yet hardly spoken herself, and began to bethink herself that she did n't know what to say. Had Lady Glencora paused on the subject of Dandy and Flirt, she might have managed to be enthusiastic about the horses, but she

could not discuss freely the general silence of the Palliser family, nor the excellent lungs, as regarded public purposes, of the one who was the husband of her present friend. So she asked how far it was to Matching Priory.

"You 're not tired of me already, I hope," said Lady Glencora.

"I did n't mean that," said Alice. "I delight in the drive. But somehow one expects Matching Station to be near Matching."

"Ah, yes; that 's a great cheat. It 's not Matching Station at all but Matching Road Station, and it 's eight miles. It is a great bore, for though the omnibus brings our parcels, we have to be constantly sending over, and it 's very expensive, I can assure you. I want Mr. Palliser to have a branch, but he says he would have to take all the shares himself, and that would cost more, I suppose."

"Is there a town at Matching?"

"Oh, a little bit of a place. I 'll go round by it if you like, and in at the further gate."

"Oh no!" said Alice.

"Ah, but I should like. It was a borough once, and belonged to the Duke; but they put it out at the Reform Bill. They made some kind of bargain;—he was to keep either Silverbridge or Matching, but not both. Mr. Palliser sits for Silverbridge, you know. The Duke chose Silverbridge,—or rather his father did, as he was then going to build his great place in Barsetshire;—that 's near Silverbridge. But the Matching people have n't forgiven him yet. He was sitting for Matching himself when the Reform Bill passed. Then his father died, and he has n't lived

here much since. It 's a great deal nicer place than Gatherum Castle, only not half so grand. I hate grandeur; don't you?"

"I 've never tried much of it, as you have."

"Come now; that 's not fair. There 's no one in the world less grand than I am."

"I mean that I 've not had grand people about me."

"Having cut all your cousins,—and Lady Midlothian in particular, like a naughty girl as you are. I was so angry with you when you accused me of selling you about that. You ought to have known that I was the last person in the world to have done such a thing."

"I did not think you meant to sell me, but I thought——"

"Yes, you did, Alice. I know what you thought; you thought that Lady Midlothian was making a tool of me that I might bring you under her thumb, so that she might bully you into Mr. Grey's arms. That 's what you thought. I don't know that I was at all entitled to your good opinion, but I was not entitled to that special bad opinion."

"I had no bad opinion;—but it was so necessary that I should guard myself."

"You shall be guarded. I 'll take you under my shield. Mr. Grey shan't be named to you, except that I shall expect you to tell me all about it; and you must tell me all about that dangerous cousin, too, of whom they were saying such terrible things down in Scotland. I had heard of him before." These last words Lady Glencora spoke in a lower voice and in an altered tone,—slowly, as though she were thinking of something that pained her. It was from Burgo Fitzgerald that she had heard of George Vavasor.

Alice did not know what to say. She found it impossible to discuss all the most secret and deepest of her feelings out in that open carriage, perhaps in the hearing of the servant behind, on this her first meeting with her cousin,—of whom, in fact, she knew very little. She had not intended to discuss these things at all, and certainly not in such a manner as this. So she remained silent. "This is the beginning of the park," said Lady Glencora, pointing to a grand old ruin of an oak tree, which stood on the wide margin of the road, outside the rounded corner of the park palings, propped up with a skeleton of supporting sticks all round it. "And that is Matching oak, under which Cœur de Lion or Edward the Third, I forget which, was met by Sir Guy de Palisere as he came from the war, or from hunting, or something of that kind. It was the king, you know, who had been fighting or whatever it was, and Sir Guy entertained him when he was very tired. Jeffrey Palliser, who is my husband's cousin, says that old Sir Guy luckily pulled out his brandy-flask. But the king immediately gave him all the lands of Matching,—only there was a priory then and a lot of monks, and I don't quite understand how that was. But I know one of the younger brothers always used to be abbot and sit in the House of Lords. And the king gave him Littlebury at the same time, which is about seven miles away from here. As Jeffrey Palliser says, it was a great deal of money for a pull at his flask. Jeffrey Palliser is here now, and I hope you 'll like him. If I have no child, and Mr. Palliser were not to marry again, Jeffrey would be the heir." And here again her voice was low and slow, and altogether changed in its tone.

"I suppose that 's the way most of the old families got their estates."

"Either so, or by robbery. Many of them were terrible thieves, my dear, and I dare say Sir Guy was no better than he should be. But since that they have always called some of the Pallisers Plantagenet. My husband's name is Plantagenet. The Duke is called George Plantagenet and the king was his godfather. The queen is my godmother, I believe, but I don't know that I 'm much the better for it. There 's no use in godfathers and godmothers;—do you think there is?"

"Not much as it 's managed now."

"If I had a child,—oh, Alice; it 's a dreadful thing not to have a child when so much depends on it!"

"But you 're such a short time married yet."

"Ah, well; I can see it in his eyes when he asks me questions; but I don't think he 'd say an unkind word, not if his own position depended on it. Ah, well; this is Matching. That other gate we passed, where Dandy wanted to turn in,—that 's where we usually go up, but I 've brought you round to show you the town. That 's the inn,—whoever can possibly come to stay there I don't know; I never saw anybody go in or out. That 's the baker who bakes our bread,—we baked it at the house at first, but nobody could eat it; and I know that that man there mends Mr. Palliser's shoes. He 's very particular about his shoes. We shall see the church as we go in at the other gate. It is in the park, and is very pretty,—but not half so pretty as the priory ruins close to the house. The ruins are our great lion. I do so love to

wander about them at moonlight. I often think of you when I do; I don't know why.—But I do know why, and I 'll tell you some day. Come, Miss Flirt!"

As they drove up through the park, Lady Glencora pointed out first the church and then the ruins, through the midst of which the road ran, and then they were at once before the front door. The corner of the modern house came within two hundred yards of the gateway of the old priory. It was a large building, very pretty, with two long fronts; but it was no more than a house. It was not a palace, nor a castle, nor was it hardly to be called a mansion. It was built with gabled roofs, four of which formed the side from which the windows of the drawing-rooms opened out upon a lawn which separated the house from the old ruins, and which indeed surrounded the ruins, and went inside them, forming the present flooring of the old chapel, and the old refectory, and the old cloisters. Much of the cloisters indeed was standing, and there the stone pavement remained; but the square of the cloisters was all turfed, and in the middle of it stood a large modern stone vase, out of the broad basin of which hung flowering creepers and green tendrils.

As Lady Glencora drove up to the door, a gentleman, who had heard the sound of the wheels, came forth to meet them. "There 's Mr. Palliser," said she; "that shows that you are an honoured guest, for you may be sure that he is hard at work and would not have come out for anybody else. Plantagenet, here is Miss Vavasor, perished. Alice, my husband."

Then Mr. Palliser put forth his hand and helped her out of the carriage.

"I hope you 've not found it very cold," said he. "The winter has come upon us quite suddenly."

He said nothing more to her than this, till he met her again before dinner. He was a tall thin man, apparently not more than thirty years of age, looking in all respects like a gentleman, but with nothing in his appearance that was remarkable. It was a face that you might see and forget, and see again and forget again; and yet when you looked at it and pulled it to pieces, you found that it was a fairly good face, showing intellect in the forehead, and much character in the mouth. The eyes too, though not to be called bright, had always something to say for themselves, looking as though they had a real meaning. But the outline of the face was almost insignificant, being too thin; and he wore no beard to give it character. But, indeed, Mr. Palliser was a man who had never thought of assisting his position in the world by his outward appearance. Not to be looked at, but to be read about in the newspapers, was his ambition. Men said that he was to be Chancellor of the Exchequer, and no one thought of suggesting that the insignificance of his face would stand in his way.

"Are the people all out?" his wife asked him.

"The men have not come in from shooting;—at least I think not;—and some of the ladies are driving, I suppose. But I have n't seen anybody since you went."

"Of course you have n't. He never has time, Alice, to see any one. But we 'll go upstairs, dear. I told them to let us have tea in my dressing-room, as I thought you 'd like that better than going into the drawing-room before you had taken off your

things. You must be famished, I know. Then you can come down, or if you want to avoid two dressings you can sit over the fire upstairs till dinner-time." So saying she skipped upstairs and Alice followed her. "Here 's my dressing-room, and here 's your room all but opposite. You look out into the park. It 's pretty, is n't it? But come into my dressing-room, and see the ruins out of the window."

Alice followed Lady Glencora across the passage into what she called her dressing-room, and there found herself surrounded by an infinitude of feminine luxuries. The prettiest of tables were there;—the easiest of chairs;—the most costly of cabinets;—the quaintest of old china ornaments. It was bright with the gayest colours,—made pleasant to the eye with the binding of many books, having nymphs painted on the ceiling and little Cupids on the doors. "Is n't it pretty?" she said, turning quickly on Alice. "I call it my dressing-room because in that way I can keep people out of it, but I have my brushes and soap in a little closet there, and my clothes,—my clothes are everywhere, I suppose, only there are none of them here. Is n't it pretty?"

"Very pretty."

"The Duke did it all. He understands such things thoroughly. Now to Mr. Palliser a dressing-room is a dressing-room, and a bedroom a bedroom. He cares for nothing being pretty; not even his wife, or he would n't have married me."

"You would n't say that if you meant it."

"Well, I don't know. Sometimes when I look at myself, when I simply am myself, with no making up or grimacing, you know, I think I 'm the ugliest

young woman the sun ever shone on. And in ten years' time I shall be the ugliest old woman. Only think,—my hair is beginning to get grey, and I 'm not twenty-one yet. Look at it; " and she lifted up the wavy locks just above her ear. " But there 's one comfort; he does n't care about beauty. How old are you? "

" Over five-and-twenty," said Alice.

" Nonsense;—then I ought n't to have asked you. I am so sorry."

" That 's nonsense, at any rate. Why should you think I should be ashamed of my age? "

" I don't know why, only somehow, people are; and I did n't think you were so old. Five-and-twenty seems so old to me. It would be nothing if you were married; only, you see, you won't get married."

" Perhaps I may yet; some day."

" Of course you will. You 'll have to give way. You 'll find that they 'll get the better of you. Your father will storm at you, and Lady Macleod will preach at you, and Lady Midlothian will jump upon you."

" I 'm not a bit afraid of Lady Midlothian."

" I know what it is, my dear, to be jumped upon. We talk with such horror of the French people giving their daughters in marriage, just as they might sell a house or a field, but we do exactly the same thing ourselves. When they all come upon you in earnest how are you to stand against them? How can any girl do it ? "

" I think I shall be able."

" To be sure you 're older,—and you are not so heavily weighted. But never mind; I did n't mean

to talk about that;—not yet at any rate. Well, now, my dear, I must go down. The Duchess of St. Bungay is here, and Mr. Palliser will be angry if I don't do pretty to her. The Duke is to be the new President of the Council, or rather, I believe he is President now. I try to remember it all, but it is so hard when one does n't really care twopence how it goes. Not but what I 'm very anxious that Mr. Palliser should be Chancellor of the Exchequer. And now, will you remain here, or will you come down with me, or will you go to your own room, and I 'll call for you when I go down to dinner? We dine at eight."

Alice decided that she would stay in her own room till dinner-time, and was taken there by Lady Glencora. She found her maid unpacking her clothes, and for a while employed herself in assisting at the work; but that was soon done, and then she was left alone. "I shall feel so strange, ma'am, among all those people downstairs," said the girl. "They all seem to look at me as though they did n't know who I was."

"You 'll get over that soon, Jane."

"I suppose I shall; but you see, they 're all like knowing each other, miss."

Alice, when she sat down alone, felt herself to be very much in the same condition as her maid. What would the Duchess of St. Bungay or Mr. Jeffrey Palliser,—who himself might live to be a duke if things went well for him,—care for her? As to Mr. Palliser, the master of the house, it was already evident to her that he would not put himself out of his way for her. Had she not done wrong to come there? If it were possible for her to fly away, back to the dulness of Queen Anne Street, or even to the preachings

of Lady Macleod, would she not do so immediately? What business had she,—she asked herself,—to come to such a house as that? Lady Glencora was very kind to her, but frightened her even by her kindness. Moreover, she was aware that Lady Glencora could not devote herself especially to any such guest as she was. Lady Glencora must of course look after her duchesses, and do pretty, as she called it, to her husband's important political alliances.

And then she began to think about Lady Glencora herself. What a strange, weird nature she was,—with her round blue eyes and wavy hair, looking sometimes like a child and sometimes almost like an old woman! And how she talked! What things she said, and what terrible forebodings she uttered of stranger things that she meant to say! Why had she at their first meeting made that allusion to the mode of her own betrothal,—and then, checking herself for speaking of it so soon, almost declare that she meant to speak more of it hereafter? "She should never mention it to any one," said Alice to herself. "If her lot in life has not satisfied her, there is so much the more reason why she should not mention it." Then Alice protested to herself that no father, no aunt, no Lady Midlothian should persuade her into a marriage of which she feared the consequences. But Lady Glencora had made for herself excuses which were not altogether untrue. She had been very young, and had been terribly weighted with her wealth.

And it seemed to Alice that her cousin had told her everything in that hour and a half that they had been together. She had given a whole history of her husband and of herself. She had said how indifferent he

was to her pleasures, and how vainly she strove to interest herself in his pursuits. And then, as yet, she was childless and without prospect of a child, when, as she herself had said,—"so much depended on it." It was very strange to Alice that all this should have been already told to her. And why should Lady Glencora think of Alice when she walked out among the priory ruins by moonlight?

The two hours seemed to be very long,—as though she were passing her time in absolute seclusion at Matching. Of course she did not dare to go downstairs. But at last her maid came to dress her.

"How do you get on below, Jane?" her mistress asked her.

"Why, miss, they are uncommon civil, and I don't think after all it will be so bad. We had our teas very comfortable in the housekeeper's room. There are five or six of us altogether, all ladies'-maids, miss; and there 's nothing on earth to do all the day long, only sit and do a little needlework over the fire."

A few minutes before eight Lady Glencora knocked at Alice's door, and took her arm to lead her to the drawing-room. Alice saw that she was magnificently dressed, with an enormous expanse of robe, and that her locks had been so managed that no one could suspect the presence of a gray hair. Indeed, with all her magnificence, she looked almost a child. "Let me see," she said, as they went downstairs together. "I 'll tell Jeffrey to take you in to dinner. He 's about the easiest young man we have here. He rather turns up his nose at everything, but that does n't make him the less agreeable; does it, dear?—unless he turns up his nose at you, you know."

"But perhaps he will."

"No; he won't do that. That would be uncourteous,—and he 's the most courteous man in the world. There 's nobody here, you see," she said as they entered the room, "and I did n't suppose there would be. It 's always proper to be first in one 's own house. I do so try to be proper,—and it is such trouble. Talking of people earning their bread, Alice; —I 'm sure I earn mine. Oh dear!—what fun it would be to be sitting somewhere in Asia, eating a chicken with one's fingers, and lighting a big fire outside one's tent to keep off the lions and tigers. Fancy your being on one side of the fire and the lions and tigers on the other, grinning at you through the flames!" Then Lady Glencora strove to look like a lion, and grinned at herself in the glass.

"That sort of grin would n't frighten me," said Alice.

"I dare say not. I have been reading about it in that woman's travels. Oh, here they are, and I must n't make any more faces. Duchess, do come to the fire. I hope you 've got warm again. This is my cousin, Miss Vavasor."

The Duchess made a stiff little bow of condescension, and then declared that she was charmingly warm. "I don't know how you manage in your house, but the staircases are so comfortable. Now at Longroyston we 've taken all the trouble in the world, —put down hot-water pipes all over the house, and everything else that could be thought of, and yet you can't move about the place without meeting with draughts at every corner of the passages." The Duchess spoke with an enormous emphasis on every

other word, sometimes putting so great a stress on some special syllable, as almost to bring her voice to a whistle. This she had done with the word "pipes" to a great degree,—so that Alice never afterwards forgot the hot-water pipes of Longroyston. "I was telling Lady Glencora, Miss Palliser, that I never knew a house so warm as this,—or, I 'm sorry to say,"—and here the emphasis was very strong on the word sorry,—"so cold as Longroyston." And the tone in which Longroyston was uttered would almost have drawn tears from a critical audience in the pit of a playhouse. The Duchess was a woman of about forty, very handsome, but with no meaning in her beauty, carrying a good fixed colour in her face, which did not look like paint, but which probably had received some little assistance from art. She was a well-built, sizeable woman, with good proportions and fine health,—but a fool. She had addressed herself to one Miss Palliser; but two Miss Pallisers, cousins of Plantagenet Palliser, had entered the room at the same time, of whom I may say, whatever other traits of character they may have possessed, that at any rate they were not fools.

"It 's always easy to warm a small house like this," said Miss Palliser, whose Christian names, unfortunately for her, were Iphigenia Theodata, and who by her cousin and sister was called Iphy—"and I suppose equally difficult to warm a large one such as Longroyston." The other Miss Palliser had been christened Euphemia.

"We 've got no pipes, Duchess, at any rate," said Lady Glencora; and Alice, as she sat listening, thought she discerned in Lady Glencora's pronuncia-

tion of the word pipes an almost hidden imitation of the Duchess's whistle. It must have been so, for at the moment Lady Glencora's eye met Alice's for an instant, and was then withdrawn, so that Alice was compelled to think that her friend and cousin was not always quite successful in those struggles she made to be proper.

Then the gentlemen came in one after another, and other ladies, till about thirty people were assembled. Mr. Palliser came up and spoke another word to Alice in a kind voice,—meant to express some sense of connection if not cousinship. "My wife has been thinking so much of your coming. I hope we shall be able to amuse you." Alice, who had already begun to feel desolate, was grateful, and made up her mind that she would try to like Mr. Palliser.

Jeffrey Palliser was almost the last in the room, but directly he entered Lady Glencora got up from her seat, and met him as he was coming into the crowd. "You must take my cousin, Alice Vavasor, in to dinner," she said, "and—will you oblige me to-day?"

"Yes;—as you ask me like that."

"Then try to make her comfortable." After that she introduced them, and Jeffrey Palliser stood opposite to Alice, talking to her, till dinner was announced.

CHAPTER XXIII.

DINNER AT MATCHING PRIORY.

Alice found herself seated near to Lady Glencora's end of the table, and, in spite of her resolution to like Mr. Palliser, she was not sorry that such an arrangement had been made. Mr. Palliser had taken the Duchess out to dinner, and Alice wished to be as far removed as possible from her Grace. She found herself seated between her bespoken friend Jeffrey Palliser and the Duke, and as soon as she was seated Lady Glencora introduced her to her second neighbour. "My cousin, Duke," Lady Glencora said, "and a terrible radical."

"Oh, indeed; I 'm glad of that. We 're sadly in want of a few leading radicals, and perhaps I may be able to gain one now."

Alice thought of her cousin George, and wished that he, instead of herself, was sitting next to the Duke of St. Bungay. "But I 'm afraid I never shall be a leading radical," she said.

"You shall lead me at any rate, if you will," said he.

"As the little dogs lead the blind men," said Lady Glencora.

"No, Lady Glencora, not so. But as the pretty women lead the men who have eyes in their head. There is nothing I want so much, Miss Vavasor, as to become a radical;—if I only knew how."

"I think it 's very easy to know how," said Alice.

"Do you? I don't. I 've voted for every liberal measure that has come seriously before Parliament since I had a seat in either House, and I 've not been able to get beyond whiggery yet."

"Have you voted for the ballot?" asked Alice, almost trembling at her own audacity as she put the question.

"Well; no, I 've not. And I suppose that is the crux. But the ballot has never been seriously brought before any House in which I have sat. I hate it with so keen a private hatred, that I doubt whether I could vote for it."

"But the radicals love it," said Alice.

"Palliser," said the Duke, speaking loudly from his end of the table, "I 'm told you can never be entitled to call yourself a radical till you 've voted for the ballot."

"I don't want to be called a radical," said Mr. Palliser,—"or to be called anything at all."

"Except Chancellor of the Exchequer," said Lady Glencora in a low voice.

"And that 's about the finest ambition by which a man can be moved," said the Duke. "The man who can manage the purse-strings of this country can manage anything." Then that conversation dropped, and the Duke ate his dinner.

"I was especially commissioned to amuse you," said Mr. Jeffrey Palliser to Alice. "But when I undertook the task I had no conception that you would be calling Cabinet Ministers over the coals about their politics."

"I did nothing of the kind, surely, Mr. Palliser. I

suppose all radicals do vote for the ballot, and that 's why I said it."

"Your definition was perfectly just, I dare say, only——"

"Only what?"

"Lady Glencora need not have been so anxious to provide specially for your amusement. Not but what I 'm very much obliged to her,—of course. But, Miss Vavasor, unfortunately I 'm not a politician. I have n't a chance of a seat in the House, and so I despise politics."

"Women are not allowed to be politicians in this country."

"Thank God, they can't do much in that way;—not directly, I mean. Only think where we should be if we had a feminine House of Commons, with feminine debates, carried on, of course, with feminine courtesy. My cousins Iphy and Phemy there would of course be members. You don't know them yet?"

"No; not yet. Are they politicians?"

"Not especially. They have their tendencies, which are decidedly liberal. There has never been a tory Palliser known, you know. But they are too clever to give themselves up to anything in which they can do nothing. Being women they live a depressed life, devoting themselves to literature, fine arts, social economy, and the abstract sciences. They write wonderful letters; but I believe their correspondence lists are quite full, so that you have no chance at present of getting on either of them."

"I have n't the slightest pretension to ask for such an honour."

"Oh! if you mean because you don't know them, that has nothing to with it."

"But I have no claim either private or public."

"That has nothing to do with it either. They don't at all seek people of note as their correspondents. Free communication with all the world is their motto, and Rowland Hill is the god they worship. Only they have been forced to guard themselves against too great an accession of paper and ink. Are you fond of writing letters, Miss Vavasor?"

"Yes, to my friends; but I like getting them better."

"I shrewdly suspect they don't read half what they get. Is it possible any one should go through two sheets of paper filled by our friend the Duchess there? No; their delight is in writing. They sit each at her desk after breakfast, and go on till lunch. There is a little rivalry between them, not expressed to each other, but visible to their friends. Iphy certainly does get off the greater number, and I 'm told crosses quite as often as Phemy, but then she has the advantage of a bolder and a larger hand."

"Do they write to you?"

"Oh dear, no. I don't think they ever write to any relative. They don't discuss family affairs and such topics as that. Architecture goes a long way with them, and whether women ought to be clerks in public offices. Iphy has certain American correspondents that take up much of her time, but she acknowledges she does not read their letters."

"Then I certainly shall not write to her."

"But you are not American, I hope. I do hate the

Americans. It 's the only strong political feeling I have. I went there once, and found I could n't live with them on any terms."

"But they please themselves. I don't see they are to be hated because they don't live after our fashion."

"Oh! it 's jealousy, of course. I know that. I did n't come across a cab-driver who was n't a much better educated man than I am. And as for their women they know everything. But I hated them, and I intend to hate them. You have n't been there?"

"Oh no."

"Then I will make bold to say that any English lady who spent a month with them and did n't hate them would have very singular tastes. I begin to think they 'll eat each other up, and then there 'll come an entirely new set of people of a different sort. I always regarded the States as a Sodom and Gomorrah, prospering in wickedness, on which fire and brimstone were sure to fall sooner or later."

"I think that 's wicked."

"I am wicked, as Topsy used to say. Do you hunt?"

"No."

"Do you shoot?"

"Shoot! What—with a gun?"

"Yes. I was staying in a house last week with a lady who shot a good deal."

"No; I don't shoot."

"Do you ride?"

"No; I wish I did. I have never ridden because I 've no one to ride with me."

"Do you drive?"

"No; I don't drive either."

"Then what do you do?"

"I sit at home, and——"

"Mend your stockings?"

"No; I don't do that, because it 's disagreeable; but I do work a good deal. Sometimes I have amused myself by reading."

"Ah! they never do that here. I have heard that there is a library, but the clue to it has been lost, and nobody now knows the way. I don't believe in libraries. Nobody ever goes into a library to read, any more than you would into a larder to eat. But there is this difference;—the food you consume does come out of the larders, but the books you read never come out of the libraries."

"Except Mudie's," said Alice.

"Ah, yes; he is the great librarian. And you mean to read all the time you are here, Miss Vavasor?"

"I mean to walk about the priory ruins sometimes."

"Then you must go by moonlight, and I 'll go with you. Only is n't it rather late in the year for that?"

"I should think it is,—for you, Mr. Palliser."

Then the Duke spoke to her again, and she found that she got on very well during dinner. But she could not but feel angry with herself in that she had any fear on the subject;—and yet she could not divest herself of that fear. She acknowledged to herself that she was conscious of a certain inferiority to Lady Glencora and to Mr. Jeffrey Palliser, which almost made her unhappy. As regarded the Duke on the other side of her, she had no such feeling. He was old enough to be her father, and was a Cabinet Minister; therefore he was entitled to her reverence. But how was it that she could not help accepting the other people

round her as being indeed superior to herself? Was she really learning to believe that she could grow upwards by their sunlight?

"Jeffrey is a pleasant fellow, is he not?" said Lady Glencora to her as they passed back through the billiard-room to the drawing-room.

"Very pleasant;—a little sarcastic, perhaps."

"I should think you would soon find yourself able to get the better of that if he tries it upon you," said Lady Glencora; and then the ladies were all in the drawing-room together.

"It is quite deliciously warm, coming from one room to another," said the Duchess, putting her emphasis on the "one" and the "other."

"Then we had better keep continually moving," said a certain Mrs. Conway Sparkes, a literary lady, who had been very handsome, who was still very clever, who was not perhaps very good-natured, and of whom the Duchess of St. Bungay was rather afraid.

"I hope we may be warm here too," said Lady Glencora.

"But not deliciously warm," said Mrs. Conway Sparkes.

"It makes me tremble in every limb when Mrs. Sparkes attacks her," Lady Glencora said to Alice in Alice's own room that night, "for I know she 'll tell the Duke; and he 'll tell that tall man with red hair whom you see standing about, and the tall man with red hair will tell Mr. Palliser, and then I shall catch it."

"And who is the tall man with red hair?"

"He 's a political link between the Duke and Mr. Palliser. His name is Bott, and he 's a Member of Parliament."

"But why should he interfere?"

"I suppose it 's his business. I don't quite understand all the ins and outs of it. I believe he 's to be one of Mr. Palliser's private secretaries if he becomes Chancellor of the Exchequer. Perhaps he does n't tell;—only I think he does all the same. He always calls me Lady Glen-cowrer. He comes out of Lancashire, and made calico as long as he could get any cotton." But this happened in the bedroom, and we must go back for a while to the drawing-room.

The Duchess had made no answer to Mrs. Sparkes, and so nothing further was said about the warmth. Nor, indeed, was there any conversation that was comfortably general. The number of ladies in the room was too great for that, and ladies do not divide themselves nicely into small parties, as men and women do when they are mixed. Lady Glencora behaved pretty by telling the Duchess all about her pet pheasants; Mrs. Conway Sparkes told ill-natured tales of some one to Miss Euphemia Palliser; one of the Duchess's daughters walked off to a distant piano with an admiring friend and touched a few notes; while Iphigenia Palliser boldly took up a book, and placed herself at a table. Alice, who was sitting opposite to Lady Glencora, began to speculate whether she might do the same; but her courage failed her, and she sat on, telling herself that she was out of her element. "Alice Vavasor," said Lady Glencora after a while, suddenly, and in a somewhat loud voice, "can you play billiards?"

"No," said Alice, rather startled.

"Then you shall learn to-night, and if nobody else will teach you, you shall be my pupil." Whereupon

Lady Glencora rang the bell and ordered that the billiard-table might be got ready. "You 'll play, Duchess, of course," said Lady Glencora.

"It is so nice and warm, that I think I will," said the Duchess; but as she spoke she looked suspiciously to that part of the room where Mrs. Conway Sparkes was sitting.

"Let us all play," said Mrs. Conway Sparkes, "and then it will be nicer,—and perhaps warmer, too."

The gentlemen joined them just as they were settling themselves round the table, and as many of them stayed there, the billiard-room became full. Alice had first a cue put into her hand, and making nothing of that was permitted to play with a mace. The duty of instructing her devolved on Jeffrey Palliser, and the next hour passed pleasantly;—not so pleasantly, she thought afterwards, as did some of those hours in Switzerland when her cousins were with her. After all, she could get more out of her life with such associates as them, than she could with any of these people at Matching. She felt quite sure of that;—though Jeffrey Palliser did take great trouble to teach her the game, and once or twice made her laugh heartily by quizzing the Duchess's attitude as she stood up to make her stroke.

"I wish I could play billiards," said Mrs. Sparkes, on one of these occasions; "I do indeed."

"I thought you said you were coming to play," said the Duchess, almost majestically, and with a tone of triumph evidently produced by her own successes.

"Only to see your Grace," said Mrs. Sparkes.

"I don't know that there is anything more to see in me than in anybody else," said the Duchess. "Mr. Pal-

liser, that was a cannon. Will you mark that for our side?"

"Oh no, Duchess, you hit the same ball twice."

"Very well;—then I suppose Miss Vavasor plays now. That was a miss. Will you mark that, if you please?" This latter demand was made with great stress, as though she had been defrauded in the matter of the cannon, and was obeyed. Before long, the Duchess, with her partner, Lady Glencora, won the game,—which fact, however, was, I think, owing rather to Alice's ignorance than to her Grace's skill. The Duchess, however, was very triumphant, and made her way back into the drawing-room with a step which seemed to declare loudly that she had trumped Mrs. Sparkes at last.

Not long after this the ladies went upstairs on their way to bed. Many of them, perhaps, did not go to their pillows at once, as it was as yet not eleven o'clock, and it was past ten when they all came down to breakfast. At any rate, Alice, who had been up at seven, did not go to bed then, nor for the next two hours. "I 'll come into your room just for one minute," Lady Glencora said as she passed on from the door to her own room; and in about five minutes she was back with her cousin. "Would you mind going into my room,—it 's just there,—and sitting with Ellen for a minute?" This Lady Glencora said in the sweetest possible tone to the girl who was waiting on Alice; and then, when they were alone together, she got into a little chair by the fireside and prepared herself for conversation.

"I must keep you up for a quarter of an hour while I tell you something. But first of all, how do you like

the people? Will you be able to be comfortable with them?" Alice of course said that she thought she would; and then there came that little discussion in which the duties of Mr. Bott, the man with the red hair, were described.

"But I 've got something to tell you," said Lady Glencora, when they had already been there some twenty minutes. "Sit down opposite to me, and look at the fire while I look at you."

"Is it anything terrible?"

"It 's nothing wrong."

"Oh, Lady Glencora, if it 's——"

"I won't have you call me Lady Glencora. Don't I call you Alice? Why are you so unkind to me? I have not come to you now asking you to do for me anything that you ought not to do."

"But you are going to tell me something." Alice felt sure that the thing to be told would have some reference to Mr. Fitzgerald, and she did not wish to hear Mr. Fitzgerald's name from her cousin's lips.

"Tell you something;—of course I am. I 'm going to tell you that—that in writing to you the other day I wrote a fib. But it was n't that I wished to deceive you;—only I could n't say it all in a letter."

"Say all what?"

"You know I confessed that I had been very bad in not coming to you in London last year."

"I never thought of it for a moment."

"You did not care whether I came or not; was that it? But never mind. Why should you have cared? But I cared. I told you in my letter that I did n't come because I had so many things on hand. Of course that was a fib."

"Everybody makes excuses of that kind," said Alice.

"But they don't make them to the very people of all others whom they want to know and love. I was longing to come to you every day. But I feared I could not come without speaking of him;—and I had determined never to speak of him again." This she said in that peculiar low voice which she assumed at times.

"Then why do it now, Lady Glencora?"

"I won't be called Lady Glencora. Call me Cora. I had a sister once, older than I, and she used to call me Cora. If she had lived—— But never mind that now. She did n't live. I 'll tell you why I do it now. Because I cannot help it. Besides, I 've met him. I 've been in the same room with him, and have spoken to him. What 's the good of any such resolution now?"

"And you have met him?"

"Yes; he,—Mr. Palliser,—knew all about it. When he talked of taking me to the house I whispered to him that I thought Burgo would be there."

"Do not call him by his Christian name," said Alice, almost with a shudder.

"Why not?—why not his Christian name? I did when I told my husband. Or perhaps I said Burgo Fitzgerald."

"Well."

"And he bade me go. He said it did n't signify, and that I had better learn to bear it. Bear it, indeed! If I am to meet him, and speak to him, and look at him, surely I may mention his name." And then she paused for an answer. "May I not?"

"What am I to say?" exclaimed Alice.

"Anything you please, that 's not a falsehood. But I 've got you here because I don't think you will tell a falsehood. Oh, Alice, I do so want to go right, and it is so hard!"

Hard, indeed, poor creature, for one so weighted as she had been, and sent out into the world with so small advantages of previous training or of present friendship! Alice began to feel now that she had been enticed to Matching Priory because her cousin wanted a friend, and of course she could not refuse to give the friendship that was asked from her. She got up from her chair, and kneeling down at the other's feet put up her face and kissed her.

"I knew you would be good to me," said Lady Glencora. "I knew you would. And you may say whatever you like. But I could not bear that you should not know the real reason why I neither came to you nor sent for you after we went to London. You 'll come to me now; won't you, dear?"

"Yes;—and you 'll come to me," said Alice, making in her mind a sort of bargain that she was not to be received into Mr. Palliser's house after the fashion in which Lady Midlothian had proposed to receive her. But it struck her at once that this was unworthy of her, and ungenerous. "But I 'll come to you," she added, "whether you come to me or not."

"I will go to you," said Lady Glencora, "of course —why should n't I? But you know what I mean. We shall have dinners and parties and lots of people."

"And we shall have none," said Alice, smiling.

"And therefore there is so much more excuse for your coming to me;—or rather I mean so much more

reason, for I don't want excuses. Well, dear, I 'm so glad I 've told you. I was afraid to see you in London. I should hardly have known how to look at you then. But I 've got over that now." Then she smiled and returned the kiss which Alice had given her. It was singular to see her standing on the bedroom rug with all her magnificence of dress, but with her hair pushed back behind her ears, and her eyes red with tears,—as though the burden of the magnificence remained to her after its purpose was over.

"I declare it 's ever so much past twelve. Good night, now, dear. I wonder whether he 's come up. But I should have heard his step if he had. He never treads lightly. He seldom gives over work till after one, and sometimes goes on till three. It 's the only thing he likes, I believe. God bless you! good night. I 've such a deal more to say to you; and Alice, you must tell me something about yourself, too; won't you, dear?" Then without waiting for an answer Lady Glencora went, leaving Alice in a maze of bewilderment. She could hardly believe that all she had heard, and all she had done, had happened since she left Queen Anne Street that morning.

CHAPTER XXIV.

THREE POLITICIANS.

Mr. Palliser was one of those politicians in possessing whom England has perhaps more reason to be proud than of any other of her resources, and who, as a body, give to her that exquisite combination of conservatism and progress which is her present strength and best security for the future. He could afford to learn to be a statesman, and had the industry wanted for such training. He was born in the purple, noble himself, and heir to the highest rank as well as one of the greatest fortunes of the country, already very rich, surrounded by all the temptations of luxury and pleasure; and yet he devoted himself to work with the grinding energy of a young penniless barrister labouring for a penniless wife, and did so without any motive more selfish than that of being counted in the roll of the public servants of England. He was not a brilliant man, and understood well that such was the case. He was now listened to in the House, as the phrase goes; but he was listened to as a laborious man, who was in earnest in what he did, who got up his facts with accuracy, and who, dull though he be, was worthy of confidence. And he was very dull. He rather prided himself on being dull, and on conquering in spite of his dulness. He never allowed himself a joke in his speeches, nor attempted even the smallest flourish of

rhetoric. He was very careful in his language, labouring night and day to learn to express himself with accuracy, with no needless repetition of words, perspicuously with regard to the special object he might have in view. He had taught himself to believe that oratory, as oratory, was a sin against that honesty in politics by which he strove to guide himself. He desired to use words for the purpose of teaching things which he knew and which others did not know; and he desired also to be honoured for his knowledge. But he had no desire to be honoured for the language in which his knowledge was conveyed. He was an upright, thin, laborious man; who by his parts alone could have served no political party materially, but whose parts were sufficient to make his education, integrity, and industry useful in the highest degree. It is the trust which such men inspire which makes them so serviceable;—trust not only in their labour,—for any man rising from the mass of the people may be equally laborious; nor yet simply in their honesty and patriotism. The confidence is given to their labour, honesty, and patriotism joined to such a personal stake in the country as gives them a weight and ballast which no politician in England can possess without it.

If he was dull as a statesman he was more dull in private life, and it may be imagined that such a woman as his wife would find some difficulty in making his society the source of her happiness. Their marriage, in a point of view regarding business, had been a complete success,—and a success, too, when on the one side, that of Lady Glencora, there had been terrible dangers of shipwreck, and when on his side also there had been some little fears of a mishap. As regards

her it has been told how near she went to throwing herself, with all her vast wealth, into the arms of a young man, whom no father, no guardian could have regarded as a well-chosen husband for any girl;—one who as yet had shown no good qualities, who had been a spendthrift, unprincipled, and debauched. Alas, she had loved him! It is possible that her love and her wealth might have turned him from evil to good. But who would have ventured to risk her,—I will not say her and her vast inheritances,—on such a chance? That evil, however, had been prevented, and those about her had managed to marry her to a young man, very steady by nature, with worldly prospects as brilliant as her own, and with a station than which the world offers nothing higher. His little threatened mischance,—a passing fancy for a married lady who was too wise to receive vows which were proffered not in the most ardent manner,—had, from special reasons, given some little alarm to his uncle, which had just sufficed at the time to make so very judicious a marriage doubly pleasant to that noble duke. So that all things and all people had conspired to shower substantial comforts on the heads of this couple, when they were joined together, and men and women had not yet ceased to declare how happy were both in the accumulated gifts of fortune.

And as regards Mr. Palliser, I think that his married life, and the wife, whom he certainly had not chosen, but who had dropped upon him, suited him admirably. He wanted great wealth for that position at which he aimed. He had been rich before his marriage with his own wealth,—so rich that he could throw thousands away if he wished it; but for him and his

career was needed that colossal wealth which would make men talk about it,—which would necessitate an expansive expenditure, reaching far and wide, doing nothing, or less than nothing, for his own personal comfort, but giving to him at once that rock-like solidity which is so necessary to our great aristocratic politicians. And his wife was, as far as he knew, all that he desired. He had not dabbled much in the fountains of Venus, though he had forgotten himself once, and sinned in coveting another man's wife. But his sin then had hardly polluted his natural character, and his desire had been of a kind which was almost more gratified in its disappointment than it would have been in its fruition. On the morning after the lady had frowned on him he had told himself that he was very well out of that trouble. He knew that it would never be for him to hang up on the walls of a temple a well-born lute as a votive offering when leaving the pursuits of love. Idoneus puellis he never could have been. So he married Lady Glencora and was satisfied. The story of Burgo Fitzgerald was told to him, and he supposed that most girls had some such story to tell. He thought little about it, and by no means understood her when she said to him, with all the impressiveness which she could throw into the words, "You must know that I have really loved him." "You must love me now," he had replied with a smile; and then, as regarded his mind, the thing was over. And since his marriage he had thought that things matrimonial had gone well with him, and with her too. He gave her almost unlimited power of enjoying her money, and interfered but little in her way of life. Sometimes he would say a word of caution to her with reference to

those childish ways which hardly became the dull dignity of his position; and his words then would have in them something of unintentional severity,—whether instigated or not by the red-haired radical Member of Parliament, I will not pretend to say;—but on the whole he was contented and loved his wife, as he thought, very heartily, and at least better than he loved any one else. One cause of unhappiness, or rather one doubt as to his entire good fortune, was beginning to make itself felt, as his wife had to her sorrow already discovered. He had hoped that before this he might have heard that she would give him a child. But the days were young yet for that trouble, and the care had not become a sorrow.

But this judicious arrangement as to properties, this well-ordered alliance between families, had not perhaps suited her as well as it had suited him. I think that she might have learned to forget her early lover, or to look back upon it with a soft melancholy hardly amounting to regret, had her new lord been more tender in his ways with her. I do not know that Lady Glencora's heart was made of that stern stuff which refuses to change its impressions; but it was a heart, and it required food. To love and fondle some one,—to be loved and fondled, were absolutely necessary to her happiness. She wanted the little daily assurance of her supremacy in the man's feelings, the constant touch of love, half accidental, half contrived, the passing glance of the eye telling perhaps of some little joke understood only between them two rather than of love, the softness of an occasional kiss given here and there when chance might bring them together, some half-pretended interest in her little doings, a nod, a wink, a

shake of the head, or even a pout. It should have been given to her to feed upon such food as this daily, and then she would have forgotten Burgo Fitzgerald. But Mr. Palliser understood none of these things; and therefore the image of Burgo Fitzgerald in all his beauty was ever before her eyes.

But not the less was Mr. Palliser a prosperous man, as to the success of whose career few now who knew him had much doubt. It might be written in the book of his destiny that he would have to pass through some violent domestic trouble, some ruin in the hopes of his home, of a nature to destroy then and forever the worldly prospects of other men. But he was one who would pass through such violence, should it come upon him, without much scathe. To lose his influence with his party would be worse to him than to lose his wife, and public disgrace would hit him harder than private dishonour.

And the present was the very moment in which success was, as was said, coming to him. He had already held laborious office under the Crown, but had never sat in the Cabinet. He had worked much harder than Cabinet Ministers generally work,—but hitherto had worked without any reward that was worth his having. For the stipend which he had received had been nothing to him,—as the great stipend which he would receive, if his hopes were true, would also be nothing to him. To have ascendancy over other men, to be known by his countrymen as one of their real rulers, to have an actual and acknowledged voice in the management of nations,—those were the rewards for which he looked; and now in truth it seemed as though they were coming to him. It was all but

known that the existing Chancellor of the Exchequer would separate himself from the government, carrying various others with him, either before or immediately consequent on the meeting of Parliament;—and it was all but known, also, that Mr. Palliser would fill his place, taking that high office at once, although he had never hitherto sat in that august assembly which men call the Cabinet. He could thus afford to put up with the small every-day calamity of having a wife who loved another man better than she loved him.

The presence of the Duke of St. Bungay at Matching was assumed to be a sure sign of Mr. Palliser's coming triumph. The Duke was a statesman of a very different class, but he also had been eminently successful as an aristocratic pillar of the British Constitutional Republic. He was a minister of very many years' standing, being as used to Cabinet sittings as other men are to their own arm-chairs; but he had never been a hard-working man. Though a constant politician, he had ever taken politics easy whether in office or out. The world had said before now that the Duke might be Premier, only that he would not take the trouble. He had been consulted by a very distinguished person,—so the papers had said more than once,—as to the making of Prime Ministers. His voice in council was esteemed to be very great. He was regarded as a strong rock of support to the liberal cause, and yet nobody ever knew what he did; nor was there much record of what he said. The offices which he held, or had held, were generally those to which no very arduous duties were attached. In severe debates he never took upon himself the brunt of opposition oratory. What he said in the House

was generally short and pleasant,—with some slight, drolling undercurrent of uninjurious satire running through it. But he was a walking miracle of the wisdom of common sense. He never lost his temper. He never made mistakes. He never grew either hot or cold in a cause. He was never reckless in politics, and never cowardly. He snubbed no man, and took snubbings from no man. He was a Knight of the Garter, a Lord Lieutenant of his county, and at sixty-two had his digestion unimpaired and his estate in excellent order. He was a great buyer of pictures, which, perhaps, he did not understand, and a great collector of books which certainly he never read. All the world respected him, and he was a man to whom the respect of all the world was as the breath of his nostrils.

But even he was not without his peacock on the wall, his skeleton in the closet, his thorn in his side; though the peacock did not scream loud, the skeleton was not very terrible in his anatomical arrangement, nor was the thorn likely to fester to a gangrene. The Duke was always in awe about his wife.

He was ever uneasy about his wife, but it must not be supposed that he feared the machinations of any Burgo Fitzgerald as being destructive of his domestic comfort. The Duchess was and always had been all that is proper. Ladies in high rank, when gifted with excelling beauty, have often been made the marks of undeserved calumny;—but no breath of slander had ever touched her name. I doubt if any man alive had ever had the courage even to wink at her since the Duke had first called her his own. Nor was she a spendthrift, or a gambler. She was not fast in her

tastes, or given to any pursuit that was objectionable. She was simply a fool, and as a fool was ever fearing that she was the mark of ridicule. In all such miseries she would complain sorrowfully, piteously, and occasionally very angrily, to her dear Duke and protector; till sometimes her dear Duke did not quite know what to do with her or how to protect her. It did not suit him, a Knight of the Garter and a Duke of St. Bungay, to beg mercy for that poor wife of his from such a one as Mrs. Conway Sparkes; nor would it be more in his way to lodge a formal complaint against that lady before his host or hostess,—as one boy at school may sometimes do as regards another. "If you don't like the people, my dear, we will go away," he said to her late on that evening of which we have spoken. "No," she replied, "I do not wish to go away. I have said that we would stay till December, and Longroyston won't be ready before that. But I think that something ought to be done to silence that woman." And the accent came strong upon "something," and then again with terrific violence upon "woman."

The Duke did not know how to silence Mrs. Conway Sparkes. It was a great principle of his life never to be angry with any one. How could he get at Mrs. Conway Sparkes? "I don't think she is worth your attention," said the husband. "That 's all very well, Duke," said the wife, "and perhaps she is not. But I find her in this house, and I don't like to be laughed at. I think Lady Glencora should make her know her place."

"Lady Glencora is very young, my dear."

"I don't know about being so very young," said

the Duchess, whose ear had perhaps caught some little hint of poor Lady Glencora's almost unintentional mimicry. Now as appeals of this kind were being made frequently to the Duke, and as he was often driven to say some word, of which he himself hardly approved, to some one in protection of his Duchess, he was aware that the matter was an annoyance, and at times almost wished that her Grace was at—Longroyston.

And there was a third politician staying at Matching Priory who had never yet risen to the rank of a statesman, but who had his hopes. This was Mr. Bott, the member for St. Helen's, whom Lady Glencora had described as a man who stood about, with red hair,—and perhaps told tales of her to her husband. Mr. Bott was a person who certainly had had some success in life and who had won it for himself. He was not very young, being at this time only just on the right side of fifty. He was now enjoying his second session in Parliament, having been returned as a pledged disciple of the Manchester school. Nor had he apparently been false to his pledges. At St. Helen's he was still held to be a good man and true. But they who sat on the same side with him in the House and watched his political manœuvres, knew that he was striving hard to get his finger into the public pie. He was not a rich man, though he had made calico and had got into Parliament. And though he claimed to be a thorough-going radical, he was a man who liked to live with aristocrats, and was fond of listening to the whispers of such as the Duke of St. Bungay or Mr. Palliser. It was supposed that he did understand something of finance. He

was at any rate great in figures; and as he was possessed of much industry, and was obedient withal, he was a man who might make himself useful to a Chancellor of the Exchequer ambitious of changes.

There are men who get into such houses as Matching Priory and whose presence there is a mystery to many;—as to whom the ladies of the house never quite understand why they are entertaining such a guest. "And Mr. Bott is coming," Mr. Palliser had said to his wife. "Mr. Bott!" Lady Glencora had answered. "Goodness me! who is Mr. Bott?" "He is member for St. Helen's," said Mr. Palliser. "A very serviceable man in his way." "And what am I to do with him?" asked Lady Glencora. "I don't know that you can do anything with him. He is a man who has a great deal of business, and I dare say he will spend most of his time in the library."

So Mr. Bott arrived. But though a huge pile of letters and papers came to him every morning by post, he unfortunately did not seem to spend much of his time in the library. Perhaps he had not found the clue to that lost apartment. Twice he went out shooting, but as on the first day he shot the keeper, and on the second very nearly shot the Duke, he gave that up. Hunting he declined, though much pressed to make an essay in that art by Jeffrey Palliser. He seemed to spend his time, as Lady Glencora said, in standing about,—except at certain times when he was closeted with Mr. Palliser, and when, it may be presumed, he made himself useful. On such days he would be seen at the hour of lunch with fingers much stained with ink, and it was generally supposed that on those occasions he had been counting up

taxes and calculating the effect of great financial changes. He was a tall, wiry, strong man, with a bald head and bristly red beard, which, however, was cut off from his upper and under lip. This was unfortunate, as had he hidden his mouth he would not have been in so marked a degree an ugly man. His upper lip was very long, and his mouth was mean. But he had found that without the help of a razor to these parts he could not manage his soup to his satisfaction, and preferring cleanliness to beauty had shaved himself accordingly.

"I should n't dislike Mr. Bott so much," Lady Glencora said to her husband, "if he did n't rub his hands and smile so often, and seem to be going to say something when he really is not going to say anything."

"I don't think you need trouble yourself about him, my dear," Mr. Palliser had answered.

"But when he looks at me in that way, I can't help stopping, as I think he is going to speak; and then he always says, 'Can I do anything for you, Lady Glen-cowrer?'"

She instantly saw that her husband did not like this. "Don't be angry with me, dear," she said. "You must admit that he is rather a bore."

"I am not at all angry, Glencora," said the husband; "and if you insist upon it, I will see that he leaves;—and in such case will of course never ask him again. But that might be prejudicial to me, as he is a man whom I trust in politics, and who may perhaps be serviceable to me."

Of course Lady Glencora declared that Mr. Bott might remain as long as he and her husband desired,

and of course she mentioned his name no more to Mr. Palliser; but from that time forth she regarded Mr. Bott as an enemy, and felt also that Mr. Bott regarded her in the same light.

When it was known among outside politicians that the Duke of St. Bungay was staying at Matching Priory, outside politicians became more sure than ever that Mr. Palliser would be the new Chancellor of the Exchequer. The old minister and the young minister were of course arranging matters together. But I doubt whether Mr. Palliser and the Duke ever spoke on any such topic during the entire visit. Though Mr. Bott was occasionally closeted with Mr. Palliser, the Duke never troubled himself with such closetings. He went out shooting—on his pony, read his newspaper, wrote his notes, and looked with the eye of a connoisseur over all Mr. Palliser's farming apparatus. "You seem to have a good man, I should say," said the Duke. "What! Hubbings? Yes;—he was a legacy from my uncle when he gave me up the Priory." "A very good man, I should say. Of course he won't make it pay; but he 'll make it look as though it did; —which is the next best thing. I could never get rent out of land that I farmed myself,—never." "I suppose not," said Mr. Palliser, who did not care much about it. The Duke would have talked to him by the hour together about farming had Mr. Palliser been so minded; but he talked to him very little about politics. Nor during the whole time of his stay at Matching did the Duke make any other allusion to Mr. Palliser's hopes as regarded the ministry, than that in which he had told Lady Glencora at the dinner-table that her husband's

ambition was the highest by which any man could be moved.

But Mr. Bott was sometimes honoured by a few words with the Duke.

"We shall muster pretty strong, your Grace," Mr. Bott had said to him one day before dinner.

"That depends on how the changes go," said the Duke.

"I suppose there will be a change?"

"Oh yes; there 'll be a change,—certainly, I should say. And it will be in your direction."

"And in Palliser's?"

"Yes; I should think so;—that is, if it suits him. By-the-bye, Mr. Bott——" Then there was a little whispered communication, in which perhaps Mr. Bott was undertaking some commission of that nature which Lady Glencora had called "telling."

CHAPTER XXV.

IN WHICH MUCH OF THE HISTORY OF THE PALLISERS IS TOLD.

At the end of ten days Alice found herself quite comfortable at Matching Priory. She had now promised to remain there till the second week of December, at which time she was to go to Vavasor Hall,—there to meet her father and Kate. The Pallisers were to pass their Christmas with the Duke of Omnium in Barsetshire. "We always are to do that," said Glencora. "It is the state occasion at Gatherum Castle, but it only lasts for one week. Then we go somewhere else. Oh dear!"

"Why do you say, 'oh dear'?"

"Because——; I don't think I mean to tell you."

"Then I 'm sure I won't ask."

"That 's so like you, Alice. But I can be as firm as you, and I 'm sure I won't tell you unless you do ask." But Alice did not ask, and it was not long before Lady Glencora's firmness gave way.

But, as I have said, Alice had become quite comfortable at Matching Priory. Perhaps she was already growing upwards towards the light. At any rate she could listen with pleasure to the few words the Duke would say to her. She could even chat a little to the Duchess,—so that her Grace had observed to Lady Glencora that "her cousin was a very nice person,—a

very nice person indeed. What a pity it was that she had been so ill-treated by that gentleman in Oxfordshire!" Lady Glencora had to explain that the gentleman lived in Cambridgeshire, and that he, at any rate, had not treated anybody ill. "Do you mean that she—jilted him?" said the Duchess, almost whistling, and opening her eyes very wide. "Dear me, I 'm sorry for that. I should n't have thought it." And when she next spoke to Alice she assumed rather a severe tone of emphasis;—but this was soon abandoned when Alice listened to her with complacency.

Alice also had learned to ride,—or rather had resumed her riding, which for years had been abandoned. Jeffrey Palliser had been her squire, and she had become intimate with him so as to learn to quarrel with him and to like him,—to such an extent that Lady Glencora had laughingly told her that she was going to do more.

"I rather think not," said Alice.

"But what has thinking to do with it? Who ever thinks about it?"

"I don't just at present,—at any rate."

"Upon my word it would be very nice;—and then perhaps some day you 'd be the Duchess."

"Glencora, don't talk such nonsense."

"Those are the speculations which people make. Only I should spite you by killing myself, so that he might marry again."

"How can you say such horrid things?"

"I think I shall,—some day. What right have I to stand in his way? He spoke to me the other day about Jeffrey's altered position, and I knew what he

meant;—or rather what he did n't mean to say, but what he thought. But I shan't kill myself."

"I should think not."

"I only know one other way," said Lady Glencora.

"You are thinking of things which should never be in your thoughts," said Alice vehemently. "Have you no trust in God's providence? Cannot you accept what has been done for you?"

Mr. Bott had gone away, much to Lady Glencora's delight, but had unfortunately come back again. On his return Alice heard more of the feud between the Duchess and Mrs. Conway Sparkes. "I did not tell you," said Lady Glencora to her friend;—"I did not tell you before he went that I was right about his tale-bearing."

"And did he bear tales?"

"Yes; I did get the scolding, and I know very well that it came through him, though Mr. Palliser did not say so. But he told me that the Duchess had felt herself hurt by that other woman's way of talking."

"But it was not your fault."

"No; that 's what I said. It was he who desired me to ask Mrs. Conway Sparkes to come here. I did n't want her. She goes everywhere, and it is thought a catch to get her; but if she had been drowned in the Red Sea I should n't have minded. When I told him that, he said it was nonsense,—which of course it was; and then he said I ought to make her hold her tongue. Of course I said I could n't. Mrs. Conway Sparkes would n't care for me. If she quizzed me, myself, I told him that I could take care of myself, though she were ten times Mrs. Conway Sparkes, and had written finer poetry than Tennyson."

"It is fine;—some of it," said Alice.

"Oh, I dare say! I know a great deal of it by heart, only I would n't give her the pleasure of supposing that I had ever thought so much about her poetry. And then I told him that I could n't take care of the Duchess;—and he told me that I was a child."

"He only meant that in love."

"I am a child; I know that. Why did n't he marry some strong-minded, ferocious woman that could keep his house in order, and frown Mrs. Sparkes out of her impudence? It was n't my fault."

"You did n't tell him that."

"But I did. Then he kissed me, and said it was all right, and told me that I should grow older. 'And Mrs. Sparkes will grow more impudent,' I said, 'and the Duchess more silly.' And after that I went away. Now this horrid Mr. Bott has come back again, and only that it would be mean in me to condescend so far, I would punish him. He grins and smiles at me, and rubs his big hands more than ever, because he feels that he has behaved badly. Is it not horrid to have to live in the house with such people?"

"I don't think you need mind him much."

"Yes; but I am the mistress here, and am told that I am to entertain the people. Fancy entertaining the Duchess of St. Bungay and Mr. Bott!"

Alice had now become so intimate with Lady Glencora that she did not scruple to read her wise lectures, —telling her that she allowed herself to think too much of little things,—and too much also of some big things. "As regards Mr. Bott," said Alice, "I think you should bear it as though there were no such person."

"But that would be pretence,—especially to you."

"No; it would not be pretence; it would be the reticence which all women should practise,—and you, in your position, more almost than any other woman." Then Lady Glencora pouted, told Alice that it was a pity she had not married Mr. Palliser, and left her.

That evening,—the evening of Mr. Bott's return to Matching, that gentleman found a place near to Alice in the drawing-room. He had often come up to her, rubbing his hands together, and saying little words, as though there was some reason from their positions that they two should be friends. Alice had perceived this, and had endeavoured with all her force to shake him off; but he was a man, who if he understood a hint, never took it. A cold shoulder was nothing to him, if he wanted to gain the person who showed it him. His code of perseverance taught him that it was a virtue to overcome cold shoulders. The man or woman who received his first overtures with grace would probably be one on whom it would be better that he should look down and waste no further time; whereas he or she who could afford to treat him with disdain would no doubt be worth gaining. Such men as Mr. Bott are ever gracious to cold shoulders. The colder the shoulders, the more gracious are the Mr. Botts.

"What a delightful person is our dear friend, Lady Glencora!" said Mr. Bott, having caught Alice in a position from which she could not readily escape.

Alice had half a mind to differ, or to make any remark that might rid her from Mr. Bott. But she did not dare to say a word that might seem to have been said playfully. "Yes, indeed," she replied. "How

very cold it is to-night!" She was angry with herself for her own stupidity as soon as the phrase was out of her mouth, and then she almost laughed as she thought of the Duchess and the hot-water pipes at Longroyston.

"Yes, it is cold. You and her ladyship are great friends, I believe, Miss Vavasor."

"She is my cousin," said Alice.

"Ah! yes; that is so pleasant. I have reason to know that Mr. Palliser is very much gratified that you should be so much with her."

This was unbearable. Alice could not quite assume sufficient courage to get up from her chair and walk away from him, and yet she felt that she must escape further conversation. "I don't know that I am very much with her, and if I were I can't think it would make any difference to Mr. Palliser."

But Mr. Bott was not a man to be put down when he had a purpose in hand. "I can assure you that those are his sentiments. Of course we all know that dear Lady Glencora is young. She is very young."

"Mr. Bott, I really would rather not talk about my cousin."

"But, dear Miss Vavasor;—when we both have her welfare in view——?"

"I have n't her welfare in view, Mr. Bott; not in the least. There is no reason why I should. You must excuse me if I say I cannot talk about her welfare with a perfect stranger." Then she did get up, and went away from the Member of Parliament, leaving him rather astonished at her audacity. But he was a constant man, and his inner resolve was simply to the effect that he would try it again.

I wonder whether Jeffrey Palliser did think much of the difference between his present position and that which would have been his had Lady Glencora been the happy possessor of a cradle upstairs with a boy in it. I suppose he must have done so. It is hardly possible that any man should not be alive to the importance of such a chance. His own present position was one of the most unfortunate which can fall to the lot of a man. His father, the Duke's youngest brother, had left him about six hundred a year, and had left him also a taste for living with people of six thousand. The propriety of earning his bread had never been put before him. His father had been in Parliament, and had been the most favoured son of the old Duke, who for some years before his death had never spoken to him who now reigned over the house of the Pallisers. Jeffrey's father had been brought up at Matching Priory as scions of ducal houses are brought up, and on the old man's death had been possessed of means sufficient to go on in the same path, though with difficulty. His brother had done something for him, and at various times he had held some place near the throne. But on his death, when the property left behind him was divided between his son and three daughters, Jeffrey Palliser became possessed of the income above stated. Of course he could live on it,—and as during the winter months of the year a home was found for him free of cost, he could keep hunters, and live as rich men live. But he was a poor, embarrassed man, without prospects,—until this fine ducal prospect became opened to him by the want of that cradle at Matching Priory.

But the prospect was no doubt very distant. Lady

Glencora might yet have as many sons as Hecuba. Or she might die, and some other more fortunate lady might become the mother of his cousin's heir. Or the Duke might marry and have a son. And, moreover, his cousin was only one year older than himself, and the great prize, if it came his way, might not come for forty years as yet. Nevertheless his hand might now be acceptable in quarters where it would certainly be rejected had Lady Glencora possessed that cradle upstairs. We cannot but suppose that he must have made some calculations of this nature.

"It is a pity you should do nothing all your life," his cousin Plantagenet said to him one morning just at this time. Jeffrey had sought the interview in his cousin's room, and I fear had done so with some slight request for ready money.

"What am I to do?" said Jeffrey.

"At any rate you might marry."

"Oh yes;—I could marry. There 's no man so poor but what he can do that. The question would be how I might like the subsequent starvation."

"I don't see that you need starve. Though your own fortune is small, it is something,—and many girls have fortunes of their own."

Jeffrey thought of Lady Glencora, but he made no allusion to her in speech. "I don't think I 'm very good at that kind of thing," he said. "When the father and mother came to ask of my house and my home I should break down. I don't say it as praising myself; —indeed, quite the reverse; but I fear I have not a mercenary tendency."

"That 's nonsense."

"Oh yes; quite so. I admit that."

"Men must have mercenary tendencies or they would not have bread. The man who ploughs that he may live does so because he, luckily, has a mercenary tendency."

"Just so. But you see I am less lucky than the ploughman."

"There is no vulgar error so vulgar,—that is to say, common or erroneous,—as that by which men have been taught to say that mercenary tendencies are bad. A desire for wealth is the source of all progress. Civilization comes from what men call greed. Let your mercenary tendencies be combined with honesty and they cannot take you astray." This the future Chancellor of the Exchequer said with much of that air and tone of wisdom which a Chancellor of the Exchequer ought to possess.

"But I have n't got any such tendencies," said Jeffrey.

"Would you like to occupy a farm in Scotland?" said Plantagenet Palliser.

"And pay rent?"

"You would have to pay rent of course."

"Thank you, no. It would be dishonest, as I know I should never pay it."

"You are too old, I fear, for the public service."

"You mean a desk in the Treasury,—with a hundred a year. Yes; I think I am too old."

"But have you no plan of your own?"

"Not much of one. Sometimes I have thought I would go to New Zealand."

"You would have to be a farmer there."

"No;—I should n't do that. I should get up an opposition to the Government and that sort of

thing, and then they would buy me off and give me a place."

"That does very well here, Jeffrey, if a man can get into Parliament and has capital enough to wait; but I don't think it would do out there. Would you like to go into Parliament?"

"What; here? Of course I should. Only I should be sure to get terribly into debt. I don't owe very much, now,—not to speak of,—except what I owe you."

"You owe me nothing," said Plantagenet, with some little touch of magniloquence in his tone. "No; don't speak of it. I have no brother, and between you and me it means nothing. You see, Jeffrey, it may be that I shall have to look to you as my—my—my heir, in short." Hereupon Jeffrey muttered something as to the small probability of such necessity, and as to the great remoteness of any result even if it were so.

"That 's all true," said the elder heir of the Pallisers, "but still—— In short, I wish you would do something. Do think about it; and then some day speak to me again."

Jeffrey, as he left his cousin with a cheque for 500*l.* in his waistcoat pocket, thought that the interview, which had at one time taken important dimensions, had not been concluded altogether satisfactorily. A seat in Parliament! Yes, indeed! If his cousin would so far use his political, monetary, or ducal interest as to do that for him;—as to give him something of the status properly belonging to the younger son of the House, then indeed life would have some charms for him! But as for the farm in Scotland, or

a desk at an office in London,—his own New Zealand plan would be better than those. And then as he went along of course he bethought himself that it might be his lot yet to die, and at least to be buried, in the purple, as a Duke of Omnium. If so, certainly it would be his duty to prepare another heir, and leave a duke behind him,—if it were possible.

"Are you going to ride with us after lunch?" said Lady Glencora to him as he strolled into the drawing-room.

"No," said Jeffrey; "I 'm going to study."

"To do what?" said Lady Glencora.

"To study;—or rather I shall spend to-day in sitting down and considering what I will study. My cousin has just been telling me that I ought to do something."

"So you ought," said Iphigenia energetically from her writing-desk.

"But he did n't seem to have any clear opinion what it ought to be. You see there can't be two Chancellors of the Exchequer at the same time. Mrs. Sparkes, what ought a young man like me to set about doing?"

"Go into Parliament, I should say," said Mrs. Sparkes.

"Ah, yes; exactly. He had some notion of that kind, too, but he did n't name any particular place. I think I 'll try the City of London. They 've four there, and of course the chance of getting in would thereby be doubled."

"I thought that commercial men were generally preferred in the City," said the Duchess, taking a strong and good-natured interest in the matter.

"Mr. Palliser means to make a fortune in trade as a preliminary," said Mrs. Sparkes.

"I don't think he meant anything of the kind," said the Duchess.

"At any rate I have got to do something, so I can't go and ride," said Jeffrey.

"And you ought to do something," said Iphigenia from her desk.

Twice during this little conversation Lady Glencora had looked up, catching Alice's eye, and Alice had well known what she had meant. "You see," the glance had said, "Plantagenet is beginning to take an interest in his cousin, and you know why. The man who is to be the father of the future dukes must not be allowed to fritter away his time in obscurity. Had I that cradle upstairs Jeffrey might be as idle as he pleased." Alice understood it well.

Of course Jeffrey did join the riding party. "What is a man like me to do who wants to do something?" he said to Alice. Alice was quite aware that Lady Glencora had contrived some little scheme that Mr. Palliser should be riding next to her. She liked Mr. Palliser, and therefore had no objection; but she declared to herself that her cousin was a goose for her pains.

"Mrs. Sparkes says you ought to go into Parliament."

"Yes;—and the dear Duchess would perhaps suggest a house in Belgrave Square. I want to hear your advice now."

"I can only say ditto to Miss Palliser."

"What! Iphy? About procrastination? But you see the more of my time he steals the better it is for me."

"That 's the evil you have got to cure."

"My cousin Plantagenet suggested—marriage."

"A very good thing too, I 'm sure," said Alice; "only it depends something on the sort of wife you get."

"You mean, of course, how much money she has."

"Not altogether."

"Looking at it from my cousin's point of view, I suppose that it is the only important point. Who are there coming up this year,—in the way of heiresses?"

"Upon my word I don't know. In the first place, how much money makes an heiress?"

"For such a fellow as me, I suppose ten thousand pounds ought to do."

"That 's not much," said Alice, who had exactly that amount of her own.

"No——; perhaps that 's too moderate. But the lower one went in the money speculation, the greater would be the number to choose from, and the better the chance of getting something decent in the woman herself. I have something of my own,—not much, you know; so with the lady's ten thousand pounds we might be able to live,—in some second-rate French town perhaps."

"But I don't see what you gain by that."

"My people here would have got rid of me. That seems to be the great thing. If you hear of any girl with about that sum, moderately good-looking, not too young so that she might know something of the world, decently born, and able to read and write, perhaps you will bear me in mind."

"Yes, I will," said Alice, who was quite aware that he had made an accurate picture of her own position.

"When I meet such a one, I will send for you at once."

"You know no such person now?"

"Well, no; not just at present."

"I declare I don't think he could do anything better," her cousin said to her that night. Lady Glencora was now in the habit of having Alice with her in what she called her dressing-room every evening, and then they would sit till the small hours came upon them. Mr. Palliser always burnt the midnight oil and came to bed with the owls. They would often talk of him and his prospects till Alice had perhaps inspired his wife with more of interest in him and them than she had before felt. And Alice had managed generally to drive her friend away from those topics which were so dangerous,—those allusions to her childlessness, and those hints that Burgo Fitzgerald was still in her thoughts. And sometimes, of course, they had spoken of Alice's own prospects, till she got into a way of telling her cousin freely all that she felt. On such occasions Lady Glencora would always tell her that she had been right,—if she did not love the man. "Though your finger were put out for the ring," said Lady Glencora on one such occasion, "you should go back, if you did not love him."

"But I did love him," said Alice.

"Then I don't understand it," said Lady Glencora; and, in truth, close as was their intimacy, they did not perfectly understand each other.

But on this occasion they were speaking of Jeffrey Palliser. "I declare I don't think he could do any better," said Lady Glencora.

"If you talk such nonsense, I will not stay," said Alice.

"But why should it be nonsense? You would be very comfortable with your joint incomes. He is one of the best fellows in the world. It is clear that he likes you; and then we should be so near to each other. I am sure Mr. Palliser would do something for him if he married,—and especially if I asked him."

"I only know of two things against it."

"And what are they?"

"That he would not take me for his wife, and that I would not take him for my husband."

"Why not? What do you dislike in him?"

"I don't dislike him at all. I like him very much indeed. But one can't marry all the people one likes."

"But what reason is there why you should n't marry him?"

"This chiefly," said Alice, after a pause; "that I have just separated myself from a man whom I certainly did love truly, and that I cannot transfer my affections quite so quickly as that."

As soon as the words were out of her mouth she knew that they should not have been spoken. It was exactly what Glencora had done. She had loved a man and had separated herself from him and had married another, all within a month or two. Lady Glencora first became red as fire over her whole face and shoulders, and Alice afterwards did the same as she looked up, as though searching in her cousin's eyes for pardon.

"It is an unmaidenly thing to do, certainly," said Lady Glencora very slowly, and in her lowest voice. "Nay, it is unwomanly; but one may be driven. One may be so driven that all gentleness of womanhood is driven out of one."

"Oh, Glencora!"

"I did not propose that you should do it as a sudden thing."

"Glencora!"

"I did do it suddenly. I know it. I did it like a beast that is driven as its owner chooses. I know it. I was a beast. Oh, Alice, if you knew how I hate myself!"

"But I love you with all my heart," said Alice. "Glencora, I have learned to love you so dearly!"

"Then you are the only being that does. He can't love me. How is it possible? You,—and perhaps another."

"There are many who love you. He loves you. Mr. Palliser loves you."

"It is impossible. I have never said a word to him that could make him love me. I have never done a thing for him that can make him love me. The mother of his child he might have loved, because of that. Why should he love me? We were told to marry each other and did it. When could he have learned to love me? But, Alice, he requires no loving, either to take it or to give it. I wish it were so with me."

Alice said what she could to comfort her, but her words were but of little avail as regarded those marriage sorrows.

"Forgive you!" at last Glencora said. "What have I to forgive? You don't suppose I do not know it all, and think of it all without the chance of some stray word like that! Forgive you! I am so grateful that you love me! Some one's love I must have found,—or I could not have remained here."

CHAPTER XXVI.

LADY MIDLOTHIAN.

A WEEK or ten days after this, Alice, when she came down to the breakfast-parlour one morning, found herself alone with Mr. Bott. It was the fashion at Matching Priory for people to assemble rather late in the day. The nominal hour for breakfast was ten, and none of the ladies of the party were ever seen before that. Some of the gentlemen would breakfast earlier, especially on hunting mornings; and on some occasions the ladies, when they came together, would find themselves altogether deserted by their husbands and brothers. On this day it was fated that Mr. Bott alone should represent the sterner sex, and when Alice entered the room he was standing on the rug with his back to the fire, waiting till the appearance of some other guest should give him the sanction necessary for the commencement of his morning meal. Alice, when she saw him, would have retreated had it been possible, for she had learned to dislike him greatly, and was, indeed, almost afraid of him; but she could not do so without making her flight too conspicuous.

"Do you intend to prolong your stay here, Miss Vavasor?" said Mr. Bott, taking advantage of the first moment at which she looked up from a letter which she was reading.

"For a few more days, I think," said Alice.

"Ah!—I 'm glad of that. Mr. Palliser has pressed me so much to remain till he goes to the Duke's, that I cannot get away sooner. As I am an unmarried man myself, I can employ my time as well in one place as in another;—at this time of the year, at least."

"You must find that very convenient," said Alice.

"Yes, it is convenient. You see in my position,—parliamentary position, I mean,—I am obliged, as a public man, to act in concert with others. A public man can be of no service unless he is prepared to do that. We must give and take, you know, Miss Vavasor."

As Miss Vavasor made no remark in answer to this, Mr. Bott continued—"I always say to the men of my party,—of course I regard myself as belonging to the extreme radicals——"

"Oh, indeed!" said Alice.

"Yes. I came into Parliament on that understanding; and I have never seen any occasion as yet to change any political opinion that I have expressed. But I always say to the gentlemen with whom I act, that nothing can be done if we don't give and take. I don't mind saying to you, Miss Vavasor, that I look upon our friend, Mr. Palliser, as the most rising man in the country. I do, indeed."

"I am happy to hear you say so," said his victim, who found herself driven to make some remark.

"And I, as an extreme radical, do not think I can serve my party better than by keeping in the same boat with him, as long as it will hold the two. 'He 'll make a Government hack of you,' a friend of mine said to me the other day. 'And I 'll make a Man-

chester school Prime Minister of him,' I replied. I rather think I know what I 'm about, Miss Vavasor."

"No doubt," said Alice.

"And so does he;—and so does he. Mr. Palliser is not the man to be led by the nose by any one. But it 's a fair system of give and take. You can't get on in politics without it. What a charming woman is your relative, Lady Glencowrer! I remember well what you said to me the other evening."

"Do you?" said Alice.

"And I quite agree with you that confidential intercourse regarding dear friends should not be lightly made."

"Certainly not," said Alice.

"But there are occasions, Miss Vavasor; there are occasions when the ordinary laws by which we govern our social conduct must be made somewhat elastic."

"I don't think this one of them, Mr. Bott."

"Is it not? Just listen to me for one moment, Miss Vavasor. Our friend, Mr. Palliser, I am proud to say, relies much upon my humble friendship. Our first connection has, of course, been political; but it has extended beyond that, and has become pleasantly social;—I may say, very pleasantly social."

"What a taste Mr. Palliser must have!" Alice thought to herself.

"But I need not tell you that Lady Glencowrer is —very young; we may say, very young indeed."

"Mr. Bott, I will not talk to you about Lady Glencora Palliser."

This Alice said in a determined voice, and with all the power of resistance at her command. She frowned too, and looked savagely at Mr. Bott. But he was a

man of considerable courage, and knew how to bear such opposition without flinching.

"When I tell you, Miss Vavasor, that I speak solely with a view to her domestic happiness!"

"I don't think that she wishes to have any such guardian of her happiness."

"But if he wishes it, Miss Vavasor! Now I have the means of knowing that he has the greatest reliance on your judgment."

Hereupon Alice got up with the intention of leaving the room, but she was met at the door by Mrs. Conway Sparkes.

"Are you running from your breakfast, Miss Vavasor?" said she.

"No, Mrs. Sparkes; I am running from Mr. Bott," said Alice, who was almost beside herself with anger.

"Mr. Bott, what is this?" said Mrs. Sparkes.

"Ha, ha, ha," laughed Mr. Bott.

Alice returned to the room, and Mrs. Sparkes immediately saw that she had in truth been running from Mr. Bott. "I hope I shall be able to keep the peace," said she. "I trust his offence was not one that requires special punishment."

"Ha, ha, ha," again laughed Mr. Bott, who rather liked his position.

Alice was very angry with herself, feeling that she had told more of the truth to Mrs. Sparkes than she should have done, unless she was prepared to tell the whole. As it was, she wanted to say something, and did not know what to say; but her confusion was at once stopped by the entrance of Lady Glencora.

"Mrs. Sparkes, good morning," said Lady Glen-

cora. "I hope nobody has waited breakfast. Good morning, Mr. Bott. Oh, Alice!"

"What is the matter?" said Alice, going up to her.

"Oh, Alice; such a blow!" But Alice could see that her cousin was not quite in earnest;—that the new trouble, though it might be vexatious, was no great calamity. "Come here," said Lady Glencora; and they both went into an embrasure of the window. "Now I shall have to put your confidence in me to the test. This letter is from,—whom do you think?"

"How can I guess?"

"From Lady Midlothian! and she 's coming here on Monday, on her road to London. Unless you tell me that you are quite sure this is as unexpected by me as by you, I will never speak to you again."

"I am quite sure of that."

"Ah! then we can consult. But first we 'll go and have some breakfast." Then more ladies swarmed into the room,—the Duchess and her daughter, and the two Miss Pallisers, and others; and Mr. Bott had his hands full in attending,—or rather in offering to attend, to their little wants.

The morning was nearly gone before Alice and her cousin had any further opportunity of discussing in private the approach of Lady Midlothian; but Mr. Palliser had come in among them, and had been told of the good thing which was in store for him. "We shall be delighted to see Lady Midlothian," said Mr. Palliser.

"But there is somebody here who will not be at all delighted to see her," said Lady Glencora to her husband.

"Is there, indeed?" said he. "Who is that?"

"Her most undutiful cousin, Alice Vavasor. But, Alice, Mr. Palliser knows nothing about it, and it is too long to explain."

"I am extremely sorry——" began Mr. Palliser.

"I can assure you it does not signify in the least," said Alice. "It will only be taking me away three days earlier."

Upon hearing this Mr. Palliser looked very serious. What quarrel could Miss Vavasor have had with Lady Midlothian which should make it impossible for them to be visitors at the same house?

"It will do no such thing," said Lady Glencora. "Do you mean to say that you are coward enough to run away from her?"

"I 'm afraid, Miss Vavasor, that we can hardly bid her not to come," said Mr. Palliser. In answer to this, Alice protested that she would not for worlds have been the means of keeping Lady Midlothian away from Matching. "I should tell you, Mr. Palliser, that I have never seen Lady Midlothian, though she is my far-away cousin. Nor have I ever quarrelled with her. But she has given me advice by letter, and I did not answer her because I thought she had no business to interfere. I shall go away, not because I am afraid of her, but because, after what has passed, our meeting would be unpleasant to her."

"You could tell her that Miss Vavasor is here," said Mr. Palliser. "And then she need not come unless she pleased."

The matter was so managed at last that Alice found herself unable to leave Matching without making more of Lady Midlothian's coming than it was worth. It would undoubtedly be very disagreeable,—this unex-

pected meeting with her relative; but, as Lady Glencora said, Lady Midlothian would not eat her. In truth, she felt ashamed of herself in that she was afraid of her relative. No doubt she was afraid of her. So much she was forced to admit to herself. But she resolved at last that she would not let her fear drive her out of the house.

"Is Mr. Bott an admirer of your cousin?" Mrs. Sparkes said that evening to Lady Glencora.

"A very distant one, I should think," said Lady Glencora.

"Goodness gracious!" exclaimed an old lady who had been rather awed by Alice's intimacy and cousinship with Lady Glencora; "it 's the very last thing I should have dreamt of."

"But I did n't dream it, first or last," said Mrs. Sparkes.

"Why do you ask?" said Lady Glencora.

"Don't suppose that I am asking whether Miss Vavasor is an admirer of his," said Mrs. Sparkes. "I have no suspicion of that nature. I rather think that when he plays Bacchus she plays Ariadne, with the full intention of flying from him in earnest."

"Is Mr. Bott inclined to play Bacchus?" asked Lady Glencora.

"I rather thought he was this morning. If you observe, he has something of a godlike and triumphant air about him."

"I don't think his godship will triumph there," said Lady Glencora.

"I really think she would be throwing herself very much away," said the old lady.

"Miss Vavasor is not at all disposed to do that," said

Mrs. Sparkes. Then that conversation was allowed to drop.

On the following Monday, Lady Midlothian arrived. The carriage was sent to meet her at the station about three o'clock in the afternoon, and Alice had to choose whether she would undergo her first introduction immediately on her relative's arrival, or whether she would keep herself out of the way till she should meet her in the drawing-room before dinner.

"I shall receive her when she comes," said Lady Glencora, "and of course will tell her that you are here."

"Yes, that will be best; and——; dear me, I declare I don't know how to manage it."

"I 'll bring her to you in my room if you like it."

"No; that would be too solemn," said Alice. "That would make her understand that I thought a great deal about her."

"Then we 'll let things take their chance, and you shall come across her just as you would any other stranger." It was settled at last that this would be the better course, but that Lady Midlothian was to be informed of Alice's presence at the Priory as soon as she should arrive.

Alice was in her own room when the carriage in which sat the unwelcome old lady was driven up to the hall-door. She heard the wheels plainly, and knew well that her enemy was within the house. She had striven hard all the morning to make herself feel indifferent to this arrival, but had not succeeded; and was angry with herself at finding that she sat upstairs with an anxious heart, because she knew that her cousin was in the room downstairs. What was

Lady Midlothian to her that she should be afraid of her? And yet she was very much afraid of Lady Midlothian. She questioned herself on the subject over and over again, and found herself bound to admit that such was the fact. At last, about five o'clock, having reasoned much with herself, and rebuked herself for her own timidity, she descended into the drawing-room,—Lady Glencora having promised that she would at that hour be there,—and on opening the door became immediately conscious that she was in the presence of her august relative. There sat Lady Midlothian in a great chair opposite the fire, and Lady Glencora sat near to her on a stool. One of the Miss Pallisers was reading in a further part of the room, and there was no one else present in the chamber.

The Countess of Midlothian was a very little woman, between sixty and seventy years of age, who must have been very pretty in her youth. At present she made no pretension either to youth or beauty,—as some ladies above sixty will still do,—but sat confessedly an old woman in all her external relations. She wore a round bonnet which came much over her face,—being accustomed to continue the use of her bonnet till dinner-time when once she had been forced by circumstances to put it on. She wore a short cloak which fitted close to her person, and, though she occupied a great arm-chair, sat perfectly upright, looking at the fire. Very small she was, but she carried in her grey eyes and sharp-cut features a certain look of importance which saved her from being considered as small in importance. Alice, as soon as she saw her, knew that she was a lady over whom no easy victory could be obtained.

"Here is Alice," said Lady Glencora, rising as her cousin entered the room. "Alice, let me introduce you to Lady Midlothian."

Alice, as she came forward, was able to assume an easy demeanour, even though her heart within was failing her. She put out her hand, leaving it to the elder lady to speak the first words of greeting.

"I am glad at last to be able to make your acquaintance, my dear," said Lady Midlothian; "very glad." But still Alice did not speak. "Your aunt, Lady Macleod, is one of my oldest friends, and I have heard her speak of you very often."

"And Lady Macleod has often spoken to me of your ladyship," said Alice.

"Then we know each other's names," said the Countess; "and it will be well that we should be acquainted with each other's persons. I am becoming an old woman, and if I did not learn to know you now, or very shortly, I might never do so."

Alice could not help thinking that even under those circumstances neither might have had, as far as that was concerned, much cause of sorrow, but she did not say so. She was thinking altogether of Lady Midlothian's letter to her, and trying to calculate whether or no it would be well for her to rush away at once to the subject. That Lady Midlothian would mention the letter, Alice felt well assured; and when could it be better mentioned than now, in Glencora's presence,—when no other person was near them to listen to her? "You are very kind," said Alice.

"I would wish to be so," said Lady Midlothian. "Blood is thicker than water, my dear; and I know no earthly ties that can bind people together if those

of family connection will not do so. Your mother, when she and I were young, was my dearest friend."

"I never knew my mother," said Alice,—feeling, however, as she spoke, that the strength of her resistance to the old woman was beginning to give way.

"No, my dear, you never did;—and that is to my thinking another reason why they who loved her should love you. But Lady Macleod is your nearest relative,—on your mother's side, I mean,—and she nas done her duty by you well."

"Indeed she has, Lady Midlothian."

"She has, and others, therefore, have been the less called upon to interfere. I only say this, my dear, in my own vindication,—feeling, perhaps, that my conduct needs some excuse."

"I 'm sure Alice does not think that," said Lady Glencora.

"It is what I think rather than what Alice thinks that concerns my own shortcomings," said Lady Midlothian, with a smile which was intended to be pleasant. "But I have wished to make up for former lost opportunities." Alice knew that she was about to refer to her letter, and trembled. "I am very anxious now to be reckoned one of Alice Vavasor's friends, if she will allow me to become so."

"I can only be too proud,—if——"

"If what, my dear?" said the old lady. I believe that she meant to be gracious, but there was something in her manner, or, perhaps, rather in her voice, so repellant, that Alice felt that they could hardly become true friends. "If what, my dear?"

"Alice means——" began Lady Glencora.

"Let Alice say what she means herself," said Lady Midlothian.

"I hardly know how to say what I do mean," said Alice, whose spirit within her was rising higher as the occasion for using it came upon her. "I am assured that you and I, Lady Midlothian, differ very much as to a certain matter; and as it is one in which I must be guided by my own opinion, and not that of any other person, perhaps——"

"You mean about Mr. Grey?"

"Yes," said Alice; "I mean about Mr. Grey."

"I think so much about that matter, and your happiness as therein concerned, that when I heard that you were here I was determined to take Matching in my way to London, so that I might have an opportunity of speaking to you."

"Then you knew that Alice was here," said Lady Glencora.

"Of course I did. I suppose you have heard all the history, Glencora?"

Lady Glencora was forced to acknowledge that she had heard the history,—"the history" being poor Alice's treatment of Mr. Grey.

"And what do you think of it?" Both Alice and her hostess looked round to the further end of the room in which Miss Palliser was reading, intending thus to indicate that that lady knew as yet none of the circumstances, and that there could be no good reason why she should be instructed in them at this moment. "Perhaps another time and another place may be better," said Lady Midlothian; "but as I must go the day after to-morrow,—indeed, I thought of going to-morrow."

"Oh, Lady Midlothian!" exclaimed Lady Glencora.

"You must regard this as merely a passing visit, made upon business. But, as I was saying, when shall I get an opportunity of speaking to Alice where we need not be interrupted?"

Lady Glencora suggested her room upstairs, and offered the use of it then, or on that night when the world should be about to go to bed. But the idea of this premeditated lecture was terrible to Alice, and she determined that she would not endure it.

"Lady Midlothian, it would really be of no use."

"Of no use, my dear!"

"No, indeed. I did get your letter, you know."

"And as you have not answered it, I have come all this way to see you."

"I shall be so sorry if I give offence, but it is a subject which I cannot bring myself to discuss"—she was going to say with a stranger, but she was able to check herself before the offensive word was uttered,—"which I cannot bring myself to discuss with any one."

"But you don't mean to say that you won't see me?"

"I will not talk upon that matter," said Alice. "I will not do it even with Lady Macleod."

"No," said Lady Midlothian, and her sharp grey eyes now began to kindle with anger; "and therefore it is so very necessary that other friends should interfere."

"But I will endure no interference," said Alice, "either from persons who are friends or who are not friends." And as she spoke she rose from her chair. "You must forgive me, Lady Midlothian, if I say that I can have no conversation with you on this matter."

Then she walked out of the room, leaving the Countess and Lady Glencora together. As she went Miss Palliser lifted her eyes from her book, and knew that there had been a quarrel, but I doubt if she had heard any of the words which had been spoken.

"The most self-willed young woman I ever met in my life," said Lady Midlothian, as soon as Alice was gone.

"I knew very well how it would be," said Lady Glencora.

"But it is quite frightful, my dear. She has been engaged, with the consent of all her friends, to this young man."

"I know all about it."

"But you must think she is very wrong."

"I don't quite understand her, but I suppose she fears they would not be happy together."

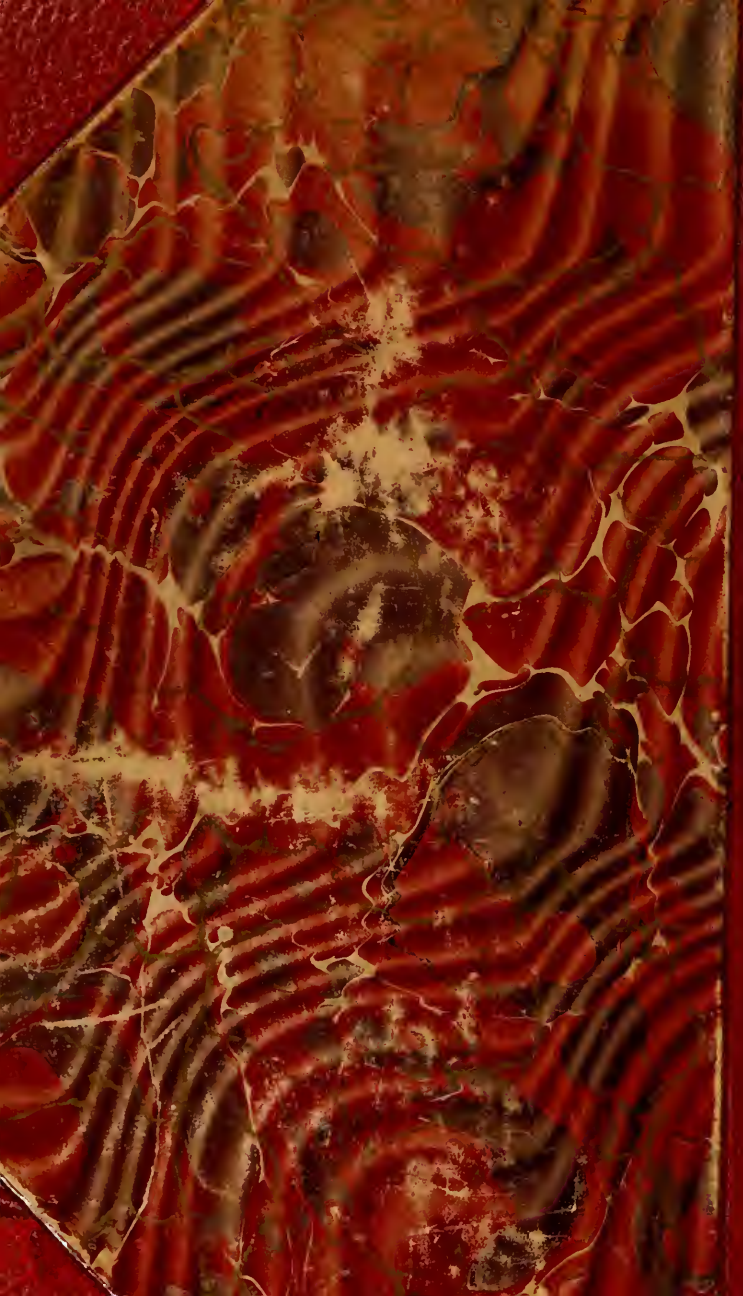
"Understand her! I should think not; nobody can understand her. A young woman to become engaged to a gentleman in that way,—before all the world, as one may say;—to go to his house, as I am told, and talk to the servants, and give orders about the furniture, and then turn round and simply say that she has changed her mind! She has n't given the slightest reason to my knowledge." And Lady Midlothian, as she insisted on the absolute iniquity of Alice's proceedings, almost startled Lady Glencora by the eagerness of her countenance. Lady Midlothian had been one of those who, even now not quite two years ago, had assisted in obtaining the submission of Lady Glencora herself. Lady Midlothian seemed on the present occasion to remember nothing of this, but Lady Glencora remembered it very exactly. "I shall

not give it up," continued Lady Midlothian. "I have the greatest possible objection to her father, who contrived to connect himself with our family in a most shameful manner, without the slightest encouragement. I don't think I have spoken to him since, but I shall see him now and tell him my opinion."

Alice held her ground, and avoided all further conversation with Lady Midlothian. A message came to her through Lady Glencora imploring her to give way, but she was quite firm.

"Good-bye to you," Lady Midlothian said to her as she went. "Even yet I hope that things may go right, and if so you will find that I can forget and forgive."

"If perseverance merits success," said Lady Glencora to Alice, "she ought to succeed."

"But she won't succeed," said Alice.

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